

*"Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New."*

— Francis Bacon

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 81 SHILLONG, MONDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2021

### From Bengal to Goa

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has obviously given the jitters to the Congress party through her three-day foray into Goa, the tiny western state abutting the Arabian Sea and famous for its high-profile tourism drive. Proof of this was the sudden visit of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to Goa coinciding with Banerjee's tour, apparently to reassure his party workers that the Congress would keep its spirits up. The state is set for the assembly polls in February and Banerjee is testing the political waters with the help of election strategist Prashant Kishor. Politics is sinking to a level wherein ideology no longer matters; what matter are evolving strategies through PR firms and pumping in slush money to "buy voters."

Yet, ground-level reading is that Banerjee, seeking to turn her regional outfit into a national party in order to eventually lead the nation, might not make much of an impact there. She is counting principally on two factors, namely the low morale of the Congress party workers and the 'minority' strength in Goa in the form of Christians. She argues that the Congress can no longer neutralize Modi or BJP - meaning she was the best alternative to the Hindutva forces. Still, she has not forgotten to add that she's Hindu and a Brahmin - the sizable segments of which too are part of Goa's electorate. She has got a "prize catch" in the form of a former AICC general secretary, Luizinho Faleiro, and he has been made her party's national vice president. She also got former tennis player Leander Paes to the Trinamool Congress fold. For effect, she also told small crowds that both Bengal and Goa shared much between them; "a love for fish and football."

In politics, one cannot rule out any eventuality. More so as the age of ideology is past and money power matters most. Banerjee might be able to buy up disenchanted old guards in the Congress like Faleiro not only in Goa but elsewhere too, including the North-East. Question is whether the wider India would warm up to her or give her a place over and above the well-entrenched Congress. If breaking up the Congress is her idea, this too is quite unlikely. The party still has a strong pan-India presence and credible leadership. With those like MK Stalin around with a sizable number of MPs, and he firmly backing the Congress, it will not be an easy task for Banerjee to achieve her PM ambition in the normal course. On the positive side, she has grit and determination.

# Are political parties ready for 2023?

By H.H. Mohrmen

The general elections to the state Assembly are only fourteen months away and the major political parties are still daydreaming about the bye-elections. They are dusting their clothes after the tough campaign for the bye-elections to the three assembly seats in the state. By the time this article appears in this paper, voting for the bye-election in the three constituencies would have been over. While the contesting parties and the voters are eagerly waiting for the results (Indian-Political Action Committee) IPAC has landed in the state and its researchers have made an extensive tour of Meghalaya.

### Are the political parties prepared for the ensuing election?

IPAC is certainly not sending the best of brains to the State for sight-seeing and those people they have interviewed, know that the organisation is seriously trying to understand the politics of Meghalaya and at least the factors which influence elections in the State. Only the individuals with whom the researchers of the Organisation have interacted would know how comprehensive the survey is. The question that the parties in the state need to ask themselves is whether they have even begun preparing for the 2023 elections? Are they planning to do a survey or conduct a study of their own to understand the mood and the aspirations of the voters in the state?

### Present state of affairs in Meghalaya

For the voters of Meghalaya, from now at least till the next elections, it is a time for introspection and time to ask ourselves if everything is alright in the State. This introspection is more important because post January 2023, the state is entering its post golden jubilee journey, having completed fifty years of its existence.

In the education sector, Meghalaya which used to boast of being the education hub of the region but now is witnessing this glory slipping out of its hands. It is now being replaced by Guwahati which is strategically located and also positions itself as the gateway to the North East. Shillong has lost its crown and will never be able to beat Guwahati in the race anymore. The entire education system in the state is in shambles. Lower Primary education which was initially administered by the Autonomous District Councils had to be taken over by the State Government

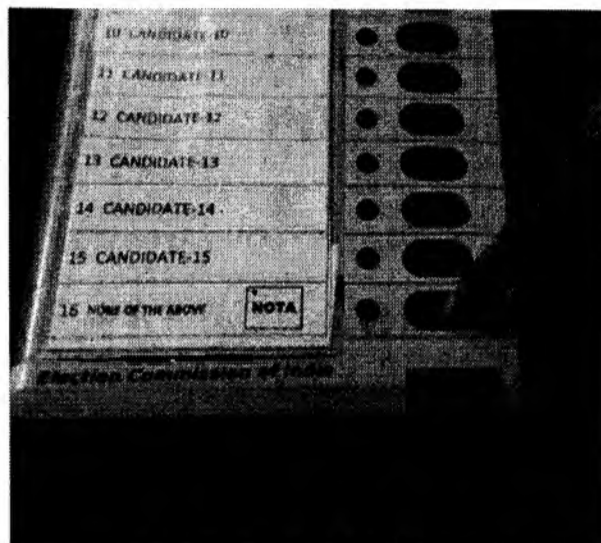
because of the mismanagement by the Councils. Has the state government done any better in managing the LP schools? The answer is there for everyone to see. Had it not been for the centrally sponsored SSA schools, the State Government would not have been able to set up new schools in areas where there are no schools.

At the Upper Primary level too, had it not been for the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), there would not have been new Upper Primary schools. The state government on its own has not been able to start or upgrade any

private schools and colleges is growing in numbers and strength.

### Health is for the wealthy only

On the health front too, Meghalaya is performing poorly particularly in the rural areas. It may look as if the state has the required buildings to run the health care facilities, but are there enough doctors at the Sub Centres, PHCs or even at the CHCs? Do the healthcare centres particularly those in the rural areas have the required manpower to run them? Do they even have a working X-ray machine?



## ELECTION 2023

LP school to an Upper Primary school for many years now. New UP schools in the different areas were started with the support of SSA only. And now the government is not able to regularly pay the SSA teachers their salaries. At the Secondary level too, all the new schools were started under Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) which is again a central scheme. Most of the higher secondary schools were upgraded without the support of the government which again makes this level of education expensive as the schools will have no other option but to charge school fees to pay the teachers.

Education is gradually going to the private entities and in the process providing education to a child is going to be an expensive proposition. In a situation like that the poorer section of the population are going to be affected and they will be denied their right to education just because they cannot afford it. The other area of concern in the state is that education is being taken over by private entities and the enrolment in

Similar to what happened with regards to education, the situation is no different in the health sector. Had it not been for private agencies including church run hospitals, people of Meghalaya would have been denied any health care services that they need. Private hospitals also provide good services, but at a cost and again it is the poorer section of the population that are going to be affected. Ultimately health care or quality health care is going to be for those who can afford the service only.

Why is the state not performing well in education and is not even able to provide proper medical care to its citizens, especially those who live in the rural areas? That is the question that the public have to introspect on. Have we done any better on the agriculture front? The major concern is that as time goes by agricultural land is being converted to residential areas or other activities which include mining.

**See no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil**  
Corruption is rampant especially in this MDA gov-

ernment regime. Police on the NH unashamedly put up barricades at different locations just to collect money from the trucks. In a way VH Pala is not wrong when he said that the trucks have become like the ATMs for the police, otherwise what is the need of having police check posts at Pynsum Kule close to Ummulung when the Ummulung outpost is not even a kilometre away from the temporary post? Similarly, what is the need of having a police checkpoint at the junction of the Shillong bypass in Mawryngkneng? This column has more than once pointed to the existence of many such police barricades on the entire stretch of the highway from Guwahati to Silchar, yet this government is playing the game of the three monkeys - See no evil; Hear no evil and Speak no evil game.

### Lesson from the bye-election

If campaigns to the bye-elections are to be taken as the shape of things to come in 2023, then the number one lesson learned is that the bar has dropped much lower. The recent bye-elections were not issue-based. Even the debates were not up to the mark. The debates are not only below par but they have become personal, below the belt attacks against each other. One MLA has even boasted that in spite of him not being able to pass class 12 after 3 attempts, yet he won the elections. What message did the legislator want to send? Can the particular MLA be a role model for the youths in the state? From what had happened during the bye-election campaign it is obvious that the parties don't even have a sense of direction or they are yet to decide what they want to do and where they want to go. In such a situation what change can the people of Meghalaya expect in 2023? The ultimate question that the people need to ask themselves is: "Is the state moving in the right direction?"

The 2023 election is going to be a crucial election for the state. Meghalaya after 2023 is going to be half a century older and the political parties are not even prepared for that crucial phase. The Chief Minister had during his recent visit to Itanagar, belted the famous song, "Summer of 69 (the video of which went viral) but what will happen in the winter of 2023, will be interesting to watch. It will decide the future of the State of Meghalaya for the next fifty years.

(Email: hhmohrmen67@gmail.com)

# Can Bollywood stand up and drive change?

By Jagdish Rattanani

There is more than a grain of truth in the view being aired of a concerted attempt to defame Bollywood, to paint popular stars in a poor light and to simultaneously discredit the non-BJP government in power in Maharashtra. The shocking revelations following the arrest of Aryan, the son of Shah Rukh 'Badshah' Khan, leave little doubt that there is a lot wrong with the working of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) under its current head in Mumbai, Sameer Wankhede. He hopefully will be removed soon but the way one officer can twist and concoct a story as alleged is a concern that should not go away in a hurry. The allegation from an independent source that he was approached to tamper with the WhatsApp data of Aryan Khan is a measure of the totality of the collapse of the investigative machinery, and further lends credence to allegations that the entire game was to defame and extort money from the richest and the best-known star of Bollywood.

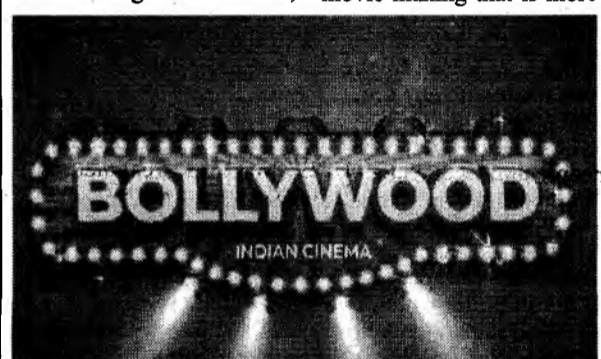
This is classic banana republic stuff, happenings that are more seen in ill-governed lands ruled by gang lords or chieftains, not indicative of a constitutional set-up at work in the financial capital of India. The rot runs deep at two levels - the political level by stoking communal divide and then the exploitation of these divides by racketeer bureaucrats, with or without blessings from above,

that when N R Narayana Murthy of Infosys went once to inaugurate a training programme for IPS officers at the National Police Academy, Hyderabad, he played one such stereotypical and unimaginative clip - hero policeman versus dirty politician/powerful criminal.

In contrast, Bollywood now has first-hand experience of an allegedly bad officer versus a politician in Nawab Malik who has patiently exposed some of the wrongdoings while stressing all along that he is concerned about justice for some 100 other undertrials who have been victims of an overzealous NCB. Param Bir Singh is another example of a disgraced cop, ousted from the position of Mumbai police commissioner, no less, now reported in hiding.

These stories are as much the truth as is the case of the bad politician. But to overtell one side builds the notion among common folk that only policeman and sundry bureaucrats are dogooders, leading to a warped sense of how different arms of the establishment work, the restraints with which investigative agencies must operate and a poor appreciation of the constitutional framework that is the only safeguard against excesses.

Bollywood in general and Shah Rukh Khan in particular will serve the nation rather well if they take it upon themselves to support movie making that is more



and sometimes to help fast track bureaucratic careers. BJP functionaries like Kirit Somaiya who met with the family members of the discredited officer do no favour to the BJP and only lend credence to the argument that the party and the Centre have a hand in this dirty game. It is now incumbent upon the political leadership in its own interest if nothing else to put a stop to this. The government must hold the officer to account if the entire Central machinery is not to be brought into disrepute.

Bollywood in general has faced the music from the NCB for more than a year now, dating back to the suicide last year of Sushant Singh Rajput, with Central agencies muddling in local area police matters that they should best keep away from. In all this, it is the film stars who have come out well, showing dignity and stature amidst the trauma brought only NCB and other action. Actress Juhi Chawla standing surety for Aryan Khan as he was let out on bail stands out as a splendid example of bonds in Bollywood. The most productive film industry of the world while producing a lot of junk (and some good quality, too) in normal times is a place for people of all hues noted for hard work and perseverance, with the box office collections in the end deciding who is the star and who is not. Lineage and patronage may help, like in any other profession, but that's all there is to it.

### How should Bollywood react?

The industry's reach and influence surpass all other media. So far, Bollywood is more noted for the stereotypical depiction of the good policeman fighting the bad politician. Violence in uniform is glorified and sanctified, broadly speaking. It is often the role reserved for afilmi hero. The dynamic of the elected leader is not much understood. This narrative is so much in the air

nuanced, and are supportive of the rights of all those who are victims of establishment overreach. He can pick up the fight for the cause of those who continue to languish in jail because they did not have the legal firepower that Aryan benefited from. That would be an activist Shah Rukh Khan rendering national service no less than the soldiers who guard our borders.

Yet, many from the Hindi film world may not have that stuff in them. They have gathered often for charity relief in cases of national calamities but their record in taking care of their own who have fallen on bad times is poor. That, too, can change if there is a sense of the political coupled with public service that mainline Bollywood can begin to embrace. Some attempts have been laudatory but it's mostly the reinforcing of dominant, oft-repeated and slanted narratives. To change will demand rising to a higher cause, with sterling examples like the late real-life and on-screen heroes like Balraj Sahni and Sunil Dutt, both of whom spoke up and took positions. It will mean Bollywood stars learning to speak a new language, engaging in new spaces and finding ideas for a new wave of films that are in service of democracy, diversity, plurality and the rights of the underprivileged - everything that is under attack today in India. What force such a Bollywood can mean and what strength can it lend for a national cause!

Shah Rukh Khan once said: "First get rich, then become a philosopher." It's now time for him to look up to Balraj Sahni, who told a JNU convocation in 1972: "Whenever I lost courage, my life became a meaningless burden."

(The writer is a journalist and a faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

### Letters to the Editor

## Of women in the Dorbar Shnong

Editor,  
There has always been a mixed message of the Khasi matrilineal society being a democratic society, where women are believed to have a high status. The reality is that while women are positioned in traditional roles that give them access to economic and social participation, yet we cannot deny that crucial decision-making in local bodies (i.e., 'Dorbar Shnong') and the larger political domain is still limited, if not totally denied to them. While there are traditions which are vibrant and functional even today, we have to face the fact that our societies are changing, especially in the urban areas. Women, for instance, are no longer confined to their roles as home makers and cultivators. Education and working in occupations beyond the home has helped them to observe and form educated opinions and views. They care for the fate of their children and society in an increasingly complex and changing world. They are concerned about issues confronting youths today like drugs, unemployment, security and crime, about

government policies and decisions that affect their daily lives and that of others. In short, women have acquired knowledge and skills and are sensitive and insightful about issues facing the society. It is therefore not only relevant, but necessary, that women share responsibility in decision-making and participate in dialogues that affect them and their community.

It is therefore laudable that some localities have included women as committee members and representatives in the local 'dorbars' for quite some time now. However, in many localities in the urban as well as the rural areas especially, women are still barred from participating, except on invitation for special issues. This is a loss of valuable input from the other half of the population i.e., women. Referencing to what was published in 'The Shillong Times', dated 23rd October, 2021, the Members of Meghalaya Women's Alliance (MWA) strongly support the move to have consultations and involve women in the local 'dorbars' and in the election of the 'Rangbah Shnong' ('local Headman'). Despite misgivings from the public, we have to concede that involving women in the 'Dorbar Shnong' will not only break traditional and narrow mindsets but will be

productive and wholesome to the society as a whole.

Further, we want to present our views that the 'Dorbar Shnong' should take the form of civic bodies which are legally recognized in their own rights, even from the Central Government. We have seen their vital service and functions during these Covid-19 times, where the Government would be handicapped without their assistance. In keeping with modern requirements, while keeping a certain autonomy, rules should be framed through legislation for proper election of the 'Rangbah Shnong' and members. There should also be the prescribed percentage reserved for women. There should be budgetary allocation of funds from the Government for various community/locality projects. Rules relating to management of financial matters should be framed to ensure transparency and accountability. Effective administration at the grass roots level is much needed in bringing about community development. We believe the 'Dorbar Shnong' are the agencies that will facilitate that aspiration because they are also seen as the repositories of our cultural trust.

Yours etc.,  
Dr JV Basaiawmait (President),

Ms Kaira Rose Nongbet (Secretary)  
Meghalaya Women's Alliance,  
Via email

## Kudos to MBSA!

Editor,  
Congratulations are due to the Meghalaya State Billiards & Snooker Association (MBSA) for having conducted the 14th state championship successfully. Win or lose the tournament displayed exclusive talents and seriousness for the game and it was heartwarming to hear Mr DD Laloo, the President mention that the course of the game will change for the better in Meghalaya but only for serious, interested players.

A shout-out to members of the Green Rollers club namely, Bishan, Shyam, Vicky and Taufique for having upgraded the Club within a very short time and inviting the top players of the State to participate.

Being a player myself, I vouch to say there's enormous potential in the State and perhaps MBSA should now shape up to gain new planners to streamline a uniform approach to upscale the standard of the games in the State and allow more talents to participate at bigger and

better levels.

Yours etc.,  
Anky,  
Via email

## Facebook's rebranding to save reputation

Editor,  
Facebook's rebranding to Meta reminds one of the famous quote from Shakespeare, "What's in a name?" If the company's rebranding is not likely to bring about any good changes in its functioning, the change of name would be unnecessary. In fact, many other tech companies have done before what Facebook is doing now. However, a mere name change won't erase the bad image it has earned over the years.

The rebranding comes at a time when the social media giant's functioning has been dogged by controversies of its own making. While the functioning of other social media platforms has created suspicion, Facebook always lead the others in controversies. Severe criticism was levelled against Facebook when "Facebook Papers" reached public domain. It has always shown a blatant disregard for the damaging impact of fake news, hate

speech and misinformation that spread through social media on societies outside the USA. Facebook has always shown a favouritism towards its home and headquarters, the USA.

That 80% of the resources that the social media platform used for content moderation and fact checking belonged to the USA is despicable. Although Facebook algorithms encourage violence, conflict and hatred, it kept quiet about it. Another shocking revelation about Facebook is that it grants high-profile and celebrity users permission to spread any kind of misinformation. It has an unfortunate tendency to support good information about ruling dispensations and oppose criticisms against it. Absence of data privacy law and lack of regulation of social media in countries like India, gives Facebook a high level of influence over public communication and opinion.

As Facebook is concerned only with the substantial amount of money it makes, it is not at all bothered about the adverse effects of its wrong policies. Hence, a mere name change won't fundamentally change its nature. A change in appearance will never solve the underlying problems.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Kollam

*"Progress imposes not only new possibilities for the future but new restrictions."*

--- Norbert Wiener

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LXIV No. 82 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2021

**By-poll results no indicator for 2023**

THIS by-election with only three seats at stake was considered serious enough for the Chief Minister of the State to camp at Rajabala for several days and from there to reach out to the constituencies in East Khasi Hills. Similarly, for Congress President, Vincent Pala too this was a trial by fire. He had taken over just two months ago and it was not smooth sailing. His colleague, Dr Mukul Sangma, Leader of the Opposition in the present assembly and former chief minister did not take too kindly to the appointment of Mr Pala as he was not consulted by the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) on the matter. Subsequently, the two were asked to come to Delhi and on the face of it the attempt at working out a rapprochement between them seems to have worked, at least for now. But since there cannot be two chief ministers in waiting it still seems like a rough road ahead for the Congress.

The I-PAC team of researchers which has been studying all the 60 constituencies for over two months now aver that there is a huge anti-incumbency factor that has set in against the MDA Government. People speak of the large-scale corruption, poor development and the fact that there are too many businessmen/contractors running the Government. At this juncture the best thing that can happen to the Congress is for Dr Mukul Sangma and Vincent Pala to work together for a common cause and leave their personal ambitions behind. But is that possible? If both Dr Sangma and Pala are concerned about the State and its development they would put their political ego and ambitions aside and work at giving a new direction to the State in its 51st year (2023). It's high time that the state is led by people with vision and not by short term business interests.

The NPP alluding to the Congress as a sinking ship is a desperate attempt to woo Congress party workers to the fold. And there will be some who might desert the Congress ship for the simple reason that party ideology has never been rooted in Meghalaya. People join a political party to get a ticket to fight elections; nothing more, nothing less. There may be a few party loyalists but even they don't want to be in a party that's out of power for too long because those party supporters too are mostly contractors that rely on government patronage. Hence the results today are not necessarily an indicator of what will emerge in 2023.

**The Hump before Hemp: Time for a policy**

By KN Kumar

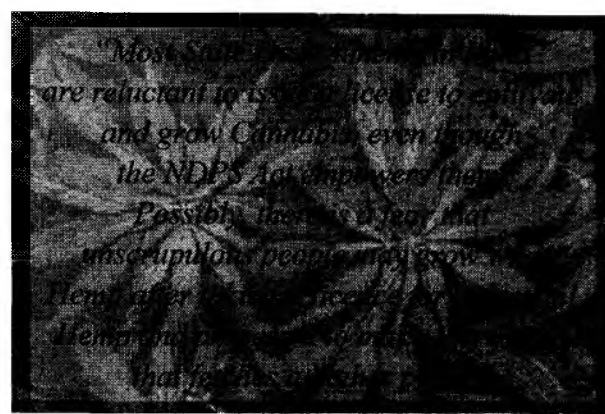
There is confusion about Cannabis. The multiplicity of Cannabis species and the borrowed vocabulary from other languages may have contributed to some ambiguity. There is also a bit of controversy over whether Cannabis indica and Cannabis sativa are distinctive species or if their morphological variations are just because of the environment in which they grow. Ganja (Marijuana), Bhang, and Charas are all Hindi words, while Hashish and Afem (Opium) are Arabic, and some of these words, have crept into the English language with new nuances - so the misunderstanding is further compounded. I am writing this article to clear the clutter about Cannabis, which is Hemp, and seek a discussion on introducing or otherwise, this crop in Meghalaya. I stress that whenever I use the word Hemp, I only mean the cultivated variety of Cannabis sativa, also known as Hemp, for medicinal and scientific purposes and not the other kinds of Hemp (some of which are likely wild in Meghalaya).

First, the basics. Cannabis is a tall flowering plant of the family Cannabaceae, cultivated for its tough bast fibre, edible seeds, and oil. The genus has at least three known species C. Sativa, C. indica and C. ruderalis. Of the three, C. sativa is taller and loosely branched, indica is shorter but densely branched, and ruderalis is the shortest. The cultivated variety of Hemp (C.sativa) is of interest to us - a low-maintenance crop that typically grows between 6 to 15 feet in height, and grain can be harvested within 110-140 days. An acre of Hemp yields up to 300 Kgs. of grain, which can be pressed into about 75 litres of oil and 200 Kgs. of oil cake (valued in the animal feed industry). In addition, 500 Kgs. of fibre will result from the 2 tonnes of straw/acre. A vast range of cannabis derivatives arises from the plant's flowers, leaves, resin, fruit, and bark. Production technology changes when Hemp is grown solely for medicinal purposes. Hemp can remediate degraded soils, so growing this crop in the mine-degraded lands of East Jaintia Hills may be a worthwhile idea. However, let me not jump the gun yet!

Now the crux - Hemp is chemically different from other species of Cannabis in that it possesses micro quantities (0.03%) of the psychoactive substance, known as THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol) and very high levels of the medicinal alkaloid called Cannabidiol (CBD). Thus, contrary to the popular image, Hemp is not a narcotic. Marijuana, a prohibited drug, is extracted out of the wild

relatives of Hemp, which have a high THC content (10%).

The World Health Organization (WHO) published a report in 2017 that confirms the utility of Cannabidiol in the health industry. The Report, among other things, asserts that the "CBD exhibits no effects indicative of any abuse or dependence potential and that it has been demonstrated as an effective treatment of epilepsy in several clinical trials". As a result, the USFDA (Food and Drug Administration) approved EPIDIOLEX in 2018 (the brand name for the pharmaceutical grade cannabidiol oil produced by Greenwich biosciences,



USA) to treat two rare and severe forms of epilepsy. The WHO report also asserts that there has not been "any evidence of recreational use of CBD or any public health-related problems associated with the use of pure CBD". According to the WHO, CBD may have therapeutic benefits for various mental disorders, migraines, depression, anxiety, seizures, epilepsy, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Multiple Sclerosis, Psychosis, Anxiety, Depression, Cancer, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Cardiovascular diseases, and diabetic complications.

Interestingly, Atharva Veda (2000-4000 ? BCE) (Chapter XI 6.15) mentions Cannabis to be one of the five sacred plants and highlights cannabis leaves as the 'guardian angel'. Furthermore, Ayurveda explicitly recognizes the use of cannabis leaves in the manufacture of its medicines. It is legal to cultivate Hemp in most countries, including the U.S., UK, Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, New Zealand, etc. CBD is classified as an agricultural commodity in the USA. Canada's Cannabis Act legalizes the cultivation, possession, acquisition and consumption of Cannabis and its by-products. CBD is not subject to the Narcotics Act in Switzerland because it does not produce any psychoactive effects.

However, our state has not yet evolved any policy for cultivating and processing Hemp. Uttarakhand, Uttar

Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan have already permitted the cultivation of Hemp. The question therefore is - should it or not? There are several reasons why we should examine the cultivation of Hemp in Meghalaya: (1) Its cultivation is ecologically sustainable - it leaves no carbon footprint (2) Extracted edible oil, fibre, oil cake are useful in the cosmetics and animal feed industry (3) The fibre is used in pulp and paper industry, automobiles, insulation material and textiles (4) Several kinds of tea and infusions are made out of the leaves that possess pharmaceutical properties (5) The leaves and flowers are useful for extraction of Cannabidiol which has

several therapeutic properties (6) Since it is a short duration crop it can be used as an inter-crop or a rotation crop between the seasons (7) Organic Hemp fetches a better price, and Meghalaya is a low per capita fertilizer consumption state.

Let us examine the legal framework at this stage. The national law concerning Hemp is the Narcotic Drugs & Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (NDPS Act). Under Section 2(iv) of the Act, a 'cannabis plant' is defined as any plant of the genus Cannabis, and Section 8 (b) of the Act expressly prohibits cultivating any Cannabis plant except for medical or scientific purposes. The Act gives power to the State governments under Section 10 (iii) to make such rules to permit and regulate the cultivation of any cannabis plant, production, manufacture, possession, transport, import inter-State, export inter-state, sale, purchase, consumption of use of Cannabis (excluding Charas). In other words, what we need in Meghalaya today is a consensus, a final political view that we will proceed with Hemp cultivation given its advantages.

Be that as it may until the State Government makes a policy and frames the rules in exercise of the powers vested in it under Section 10(iii) of the NDPS Act, 1985, anyone cultivating or selling or transporting Cannabis is liable to be imprisoned for up to ten years and a fine up to one lakh

rupees. Most State Governments in India are reluctant to issue a license to cultivate and grow Cannabis, even though the NDPS Act empowers them. Possibly, there is a fear that unscrupulous people may grow wild Hemp after taking a licence for industrial Hemp and process it to make Marijuana that fetches a higher price. Further, if the regulating officials are compromised or come under extraneous influences, the whole game can change to wild Hemp in the name of Industrial Hemp. However, these fears are unfounded because the state can determine the specific boundaries and geo-tag the licenced area within which the cultivation is permitted and ensure that the processing of Hemp is done only by the licenced pharmaceutical companies, which must set up their units in Meghalaya.

Further, since it will be a contract farming model, details of all the farmers who cultivate will be on the record, along with the area they cultivate Hemp in. Violations, if any, will make the company liable, so the rigour should be maintained. Therefore, the Government of Meghalaya should invite the corporate entities directly, and the cultivation should be monitored by the Agriculture Department.

The global market for Hemp-based products is about Rs. 75 lakh crores. Certain pharmaceutical companies are very keen to procure anything up to 20,000 M.T. per month from our state. 100% Export Oriented Indian Companies are willing to set up units in Meghalaya to facilitate the entire process, subject to a favourable policy environment. The process will call for establishing one or more, 100% export-oriented pharmaceutical units in Meghalaya, with the end product being CBD Isolate (99% pure CBD) and CBD Broad Spectrum Oil. The corporate entity will have to provide the best quality seeds of Hemp to the farmers along with a Certificate of Analysis indicating the THC content as <0.03%. 100% buy-back at such prices as would be pre-determined by the Government will be apart of the contract agreement. If the current price of Rs.1000/kg. of dried Hemp is anything to go by, the gross income to the farmers can be as high as Rs.1.3 lakh per acre. (@1300 Kgs of dried Hemp per acre). Let us look at a production of one lakh metric tonnes of dry Hemp every year from the state - a Rs. 10,000 crore business, and the state GST @5% itself will be Rs. 500 crore every year. Farmers will be better off, the government is richer, the global health care improves, and no one will complain - But where is the policy?

(The writer is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' (Empowerment) Commission)

**Urgent attention needed to rein in narcotics smuggling**

By Nantoo Banerjee

It is a pity that the rampant drug abuse in India, one of the world's top ten markets in narcotics smuggling and consumption, rarely hits the headline and gets debated nationally except when rich and popular Bollywood stars, their kins and associates are caught by the police in drug use or illicit drug possession cases. The stories printed or aired by the media in such cases are often sympathetic and even defensive towards celebrity drug abusers. Typically filmy-style, they even seem to question the integrity and intentions of the police, indirectly pointing fingers at possible extortion bid. There is little concern about the growing narcotics consumption in India, ruining millions of lives across age groups and income levels. Published reports suggest that consumption of narcotic substances in India - from traditional plant-based drugs such as cannabis, cocaine and heroin to synthetic drugs such as Tramadol - has increased manifold in recent times.

Last September, India's Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) made the world's biggest ever narcotic haul, weighing 2,988 kilos, worth Rs. 21,000 crore (over US\$2.8 billion) at Gujarat's Mundra port. Disguised as a consignment of 'semi-processed talc stones' originating from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, it had arrived from Bandar Abbas Port, Iran. Eight people, including five foreign nationals, were arrested in the case. The payment is normally transacted through hawala. As usual, the media report was sketchy: Little is known about the progress of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) probe into the narcotic seizure. On the contrary, the media provided considerable space and air time day after day on the arrest of a Hindi film star's Goa-bound son with friends in the Mumbai cruise ship drugs case. Most reports were sympathetic to the alleged celebrity drug abusers.

Although there is no reliable data available of the exact size of India's narcotics market and consumption, the Global Burden of Disease Study estimated the number of lives lost in India was 22,000 as against the worldwide toll of nearly 7.5 lakh in 2017. The annual global drug trafficking trade is estimated at a staggering \$650 billion. Ironically, reports of drug addiction among celebrities seem to only encourage narcotics consumption instead of its prevention. According to the International Narcotics Control Board, "celebrity drug offenders can profoundly influence public attitudes, values and behaviour towards drug abuse, particularly among young people who have not yet taken a firm and fully informed position on drug issues." The UN body had warned about addiction among celebrities.

However, celebrities live in their own world, often unreal and illogical, and are controlled by strong passion, emotion and sentiment. Among India's Bollywood celebrities in the news for drug abuse in the past were: the late actor Sushant Singh Rajput, Sanjay Dutt, Prateik Babbar, Fardeen Khan, Vijay Raaz, DJ Aqeel, Ranbir Kapoor and Kangana Ranaut. Kangana had reportedly claimed recently that 99 percent of Bollywood celebs indulge in drugs. She took to Twitter on September 2 and wrote: "I request Ranveer Singh, Ranbir Kapoor, Ayan Mukerji, Vicky Kaushik to give their blood samples for drug test, there are rumours that they are cocaine addicts, I want them to bust these rumours, these young men can inspire millions if they present clean samples."

Interestingly, a report by

the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre of the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) suggested that Indian narcotic consumers are generally high on heroin. India had 23 million opioid users in 2018. The number showed a five-fold jump in 14 years. The maximum growth was reported in the consumption of heroin. The number of opium users in 2004 was reported to be 20,000, more than twice the number (9,000) of heroin consumers. The trend gradually reversed. The number of heroin consumers went up to 2.5 lakh, noted the report titled the 'Magnitude of Substance Use in India' by the AIIMS' National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre, just three years ago. In fact, the AIIMS report is probably the most comprehensive on the subject. It further stated that in terms of users, India's illicit drug markets are mostly dominated by cannabis and opioids. Nearly 31 million people in India were estimated to be cannabis users, said the report.

Despite the devastating effect of drug abuse on human life and society, the law, enforcement authorities, the government, judiciary, NGOs and the public in India do not seem to be paying enough attention to control the menace. How many people in India have ever been executed for repeated drug offences which its law provides? In keeping with the world-wide trend in framing stringent law to deter drug trafficking and abuse, India in 1989 incorporated a new Section 31A in the UN-promoted Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985, making death sentence mandatory for repeat offences.

Surprisingly, in the midst of the latest drug controversy, the Union Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry suggested that users and dependents caught with small quantities of drugs should be treated as "victims" and not culprits of substance abuse. Such an advice appears to be rather funny since all drug addicts start with small doses in the beginning. This is unacceptable and goes against the spirit of the NDPS Act. It also challenges the hardening global view on substance abuse. Notably, in 2018, Harm Reduction International reported that "there are at least 33 countries and territories that prescribe death penalty for drug offences in law" and added that between January 2015 and December 2017, at least 1,320 people were known to have been executed for drug-related offences. In six countries - China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Singapore - drug offenders are known to be routinely executed.

The studies conducted by some of the country's well-known NGOs in the field and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights suggest that the substance abuse in adolescents in India is rising at an alarming rate. It is the direct result of the changing cultural values, fierce competition in the fields of education and employment, growing economic burden on families and declining supportive bonds for adolescents in this transitional age. The government, the society, parents and teachers in educational institutions need to concentrate more on preventive programmes focussed on initiation of drugs abuse, specially among the younger age groups. The government must do its job to strictly prevent drug smuggling, cut illegal supply sources and enact more stringent laws providing exemplary punishment to drug offenders as some of the Asian countries have been practicing with excellent results. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

**Rowing with a spoon**

Editor, Apropos the plight of students during the current pandemic, I would like to share my views regarding what I feel is injustice towards the student community. I take this opportunity through your esteemed newspaper to highlight the problem with a view to bringing it to the attention of the appropriate authorities.

I am a student currently studying in Class XI in the Science stream in one of the schools in Shillong. Among the scores of activities hampered by the Covid-19 Pandemic, the timelines for schools, colleges and examinations in particular have been severely affected. During the height of the pandemic, students were at a total loss as schools were barely functional, even with the shadow of education known as online classes. The SSLC Examinations had to be conducted very late and therefore our results too were delayed. After the declaration of results, everything was done in such a great hurry that it was nothing

short of chaos. Before we knew it, we were in school again, albeit attending online classes. Thankfully, we have reverted back to (somewhat) regular classes for the past two months or so.

The MBOSE has already given directions that nothing will be reduced from the syllabus. All schools have been directed to conduct our final practical examinations in December 2021 and our theory examinations in February 2022. Basically, we have been directed to complete a syllabus meant for no less than seven to eight months, in a time span of a little over two and a half months before our practical examinations. Calling this work-load a burden is too mild a term.

I am certain that I speak on behalf of all students when I vehemently implore the Government to rethink the stand of MBOSE on this matter and take some concrete action.

I do not know what will be the outcomes of this letter, but through the medium of your esteemed daily, I appeal to the Government to look into this matter and come out with a solution. We are just students who are trying

to navigate this tricky part of the great ocean of life and the Government seems hell bent on sending us out on a voyage with only a spoon to row the boat.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

**Disapproving Mamata Banerjee's Rome trip**

Editor, It's indeed most gratifying to know that the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has of late been invited to participate in the World Peace Conference held in Italy from October 6-7. This auspicious conference was attended by prominent personalities of the status of the head of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis, Italy's Prime Minister Mario Draghi, the German iconic leader Angela Merkel and a host of the religious leaders like the Imam of Al-Azhar (Egypt) Ahmad al-Tayyib, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and other religious figureheads. The event was to be centered on Mother Theresa.

Ms. Banerjee as a law abiding citizen had therefore duly applied to the Union Ministry of External Affairs for endorsement to undertake this trip but the latter had flatly refused citing that it was not commensurate in status for participation by a Chief Minister of a state. Thus, India was deprived of a notable representative in such an auspicious conference in which Christianity was represented by Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch while the Muslim faith is symbolized by the presence of Ahmad al Tayyib, the Grand Imam of Egypt's Al-Azhar. The assemblage could've offered a level playing field for Ms Banerjee to ably interpret the essence of Hinduism and its myriad positive ethos in its true perspective.

It therefore beats me why Modi as the Prime Minister of India and the RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat who uphold the concept of Hindu ideology world-wide were not solicited in the said conference. The management of this religious conclave had invited Ms. Banerjee and lauded her "significant election victory and the important work for social justice, for the devel-

opment of your own country and for peace, which you have been doing for over 10 (ten) years now". All said and done, the fact behind the non-granting permission to Ms. Banerjee is for all to read between the lines.

Yours etc.,  
Jerome K. Diengdoh,  
Via email

**Show sympathy for the poor**

Editor, The news allowing markets to open on Sundays has come as a big relief especially for the weaker section of people, including small traders, who have suffered a lot during the lockdown. They will now hopefully earn a little more. But one small businesswoman having a kiosk at Mawbah quipped, "The shop we opened in the morning was ordered by the patrolling police to shut down immediately. We are very confused and worried. Government should have been more concerned for the poor people like us than the big shops in the market." Of course, the poor woman is logically right. Vendors,

daily wagers, small traders have been badly affected by the long COVID lockdown. Hope the government will be more sympathetic towards the weaker section of people.

Incidentally, when we go around the marketplace the situation is very scary. Almost 80% of people are not wearing masks which they just hang around their necks. Some are completely without any face cover. Almost none is bothered about keeping physical distance. This is a matter of serious concern. The government must take immediate steps. Though the majority of the population in the state has already been inoculated, we never know when the third/fourth wave or virus of other variants might attack us again. I think the Police Department should not allow people to let their guards down so early. People only fear the police danda.

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gewali,  
Shillong

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*"To create something exceptional,  
your mindset must be relentlessly focused  
on the smallest detail."*

— Giorgio Armani

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.83 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2021

### Regional assertion

IN what looked like a mini-referendum on the political situation, India has expressed itself through electoral verdicts in 14 states. The ruling BJP tasted defeat in several of these fights while the Congress has proven that it continues to have an electoral heft in many states. Regional parties made their presence felt in and indications are that they are here to stay. Overall, it must be stated that the BJP has less to cheer though it did better than the Congress in various states.

Notably, in Haryana, a member from the Chautala clan who resigned his assembly seat in protest against the new farmer laws outwitted his BJP rival. It showed the mood building against the saffron party in areas where the farmer agitation was strong. In West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee continued with her electoral successes, winning all the four seats up for polls and giving a virtual slap on the face of the BJP yet again. In Madhya Pradesh, the BJP proved it had the upper hand by winning two seats the Congress held and conceding defeat to the Congress in a seat that it had won in the last polls. In Telangana, the ruling TRS tasted a humiliating defeat in Huzurabad where the BJP wrested the seat by fielding former state TRS minister Etala Rajendar. In Karnataka, Basavaraj Bommai had egg on his face as the Congress won the seat in his own political turf. In Andhra Pradesh, the ruling YSRC proved yet again that it is unsailable by winning the Badvel seat.

In the North-East, the BJP and its regional allies did very well. But, the sands here are slippery. The region and its outfits keep siding with whoever is in power in Delhi, which is a sane trend in that it helps in regional growth with more infusion of central funds – the reverse of the trend in West Bengal, where "fighting" the Centre is the main political agenda. In Assam three seats went to the BJP and two to its ally the UPPL of Bodoland. In Meghalaya, the NPP, a coalition partner of the BJP got two seats while the UDP which is a member of the ruling coalition – the MDA got one seat. Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka were where the Congress demonstrated its strength and won over the BJP. Of the three Lok Sabha seats, Mandi in Himachal went the Congress way, while the Shiv Sena took Dadra and BJP has gained the upper hand in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh, as counting headed for the final phases. Curiously, both the national parties have yielded a lot of ground to regional entities across the political spectrum. Regional satraps are here to stay. They are feeding on the incompetence of the national parties to capture the fancy of the nation.

# Meghalaya By-elections – Partly surprising

By Albert Thyrniang

The by-elections to the three constituencies of Meghalaya produced mixed results. The Congress which expected to keep its stronghold over the two constituencies – Mawryngkneng and Rajabala – drew a blank. Shockingly, the NPP wrested Mawryngkneng and Rajabala from the grand old party. The UDP, predictably, quite comfortably trumped over the Congress in Mawphlang.

In Mawryngkneng the NPP candidate and sitting MDC, Pyniad Siyem sensationally snatched the seat from the Congress. Highlander Kharmalki who came second in the 2018 elections under the flag of People's Democratic Front (PDF) could not overcome the challenge of being a 'non-Congressman'. Even Charles Pynprope could not convince the supporters of his son, late David Nongrum to stand behind the party at all costs. The decision of the grand old party to play safe and award the 'outsider' back fired. The hope of securing the combined votes of the Congress and the PDF simply did not take place. The support of the UDP and HSPDP for the NPP was also crucial and played a major role in the downfall of the 'common' enemy. The final score: NPP 14,088 and INC 12,284. The rest of the contestants do not merit a mention.

To no one's surprise in Mawphlang the UDP defied the strong push by the Congress. Eugene Song Lyngdoh, thrust into politics by the untimely death of his father, beat his nearest rival and former Congress MLA, Kennedy Khyriem in a rather one sided contest by 4226 votes. The sympathy factor worked effectively despite the zero political experience of the former national footballer. Lamphrang Biah, MDC who resigned from the INC to suddenly throw himself in the ring at the eleventh hour at the invitation of the NPP succeeded in taking away a chunk of vote bank of the Congress to himself, thereby inflicting a defeat on the beleaguered Congress. The rhetoric of the NPP's main protagonist and Deputy Chief Minister, Prestone Tynsong furthered the cause.

Unlike Mawphlang, sympathy was not enough for the Congress in Rajabala. Its party candidate, Hashina Yasmin Mondol could not appeal sufficiently to the voters. Stepping into the shoes of her late husband, Azad Zaman remains only a dream. The star campaigner, Mukul Sangma who had entertained thoughts of leaving the party after the MPCC post went to MP,

Vincent Pala, lost the prestige battle against his arch rival and Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma. His status as undisputed leader in Garo Hills is now on slippery ground. The plains belt constituency witnessed high voltage campaign involving political heavy weights who addressed large rallies. The NPP had the last laugh in the battle that also saw clashes between rival supporters on the last day of electioneering. The NPP nominee, Abdus Saleh pulled 11812 votes as compared to the Congress challenger who had to be satisfied with 9885 votes. Saleh returns as MLA after eight years. Ashahel D Shira, another Congress MDC deserter who joined the obliging UDP just prior to the election played spoil sport for his 'parent' party.

The results are partially

tatives. The implications are not fully comprehended.

The NPP and UDP are upbeat. The Congress is down (and out?). MDA partners jibe at the Congress being a divided house will be a common refrain from now on. The 'Hand' party, founded to fight for India's Independence, is at an all-time low at the national level. In Meghalaya too it may be on a similar scenario. Vincent Pala has not managed to enthuse the party. He was confident of winning in all the three seats but returned with none. But who will challenge him? Mukul Sangma too has lost ground in Garo Hills. Deputy Chief Minister, Prestone Tynsong knows it too well and will now relentlessly taunt his former party as a 'sinking ship'. Prior to 2023 more Congress MLAs and workers

*"As it turned out, the son of the deceased legislator benefitted from the wave while a widow was not so lucky."*

surprising. One expected sympathy and family dynastic politics to dominate in both Mawphlang and Rajabala. As it turned out, the son of the deceased legislator benefitted from the wave while a widow was not so lucky. Had the Pynprope-Nongrum family put up a candidate in Mawryngkneng would political dynasty have joined Mawphlang in having a field day? In a way, the loss of the Congress candidate balances things out. Perhaps merit too is a factor. Probably it was also wise on the family of David Nongrum in declining the demand of his supporters. One of the glaring defects of democracy is the perpetuation of dynastic politics. Politics has been made family business. The electorate matures when emotional ties of family and clan and religious and caste considerations, are set aside in favour of merit.

Of the three MDCs only one could register a win. The number of dual post holders in the state has gone up by a single digit. Ideally, no MDC should be elected to the Assembly as long as he/she holds on to his/her chair. An MDC who resigns and then contests other elections could be given a look in. Though two MDCs fell short, this 'stop-gap' election has not rejected the holding of dual posts among public represen-

might jump out of the vessel to survive. Anyway, there are those who ask, "Prior to 2018 Tynsong was publicly proclaimed the great chief minister, now he is certifying Conrad Sangma as a development driven (particularly in rural areas) chief minister. In 2023, to be in power, whom will he support? Vincent Pala? Or could he himself be the Chief Minister?"

The Congress accused the MDA government of failure on all fronts. But anti-incumbency did not seem to work. The coalition partners' loudest boast was the government's firm resolve to shift the Sikh colony elsewhere. The second 'achievement' is the 'positive steps' toward resolving the long standing inter-state border disputes. The trump cards of the MDA government were the above. Will the tricks repeat in 2023? Inaugurations of and ribbon-cutting ceremony for some projects will also certainly feature but how do you assess anything in the absence of a Common Minimum Program (CMP)? How do we measure whether the government has achieved 90, 80, 60 or 50 per cent of its plan sans a measuring scale? So, as in by-election 2021, in 2023 the best bet for the government is rhetoric.

Hoping that the three by-elections are an indicator to

2023 all contesting parties gave their all – human support and capital resources to woo voters. Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma made Rajabala a prestige election versus Mukul Sangma of the Congress and stationed in loco for several days there besides starring at rallies in Mawryngkneng and Mawphlang. The UDP's heavy weights were omni-present in all the three constituencies. The Opposition Congress assigned the most recognisable faces among all in the three battle fields with its new president, Vincent Pala addressing meetings hoping for a hat-trick victory. The Congress feared that the enriched NPP and UDP (candidly confirmed by UDP's supremo, Metbah Lyngdoh), may be from illegal coal business, would buy voters. Money does talk. Whoever has will throw it all to be in the more lucrative position. To what extent mammon was decisive will be heard later.

Two of three winners are maiden entrants into the Legislative Assembly. Though generous promises were made during the election trail the electors need not look forward to anything great in the next one year or so. In the next election the same persons will say, 'The time was too short. In 14 months it was not possible for me to bring in development. Vote this time too and I will build all the infrastructure.'

Violation of COVID protocols were seen almost every day during election campaigns. Footages of mammoth rallies in cramped venues especially in Rajabala in the last days were uploaded on social media and reported in the press. The common people will continue to wonder as to why the bureaucrats continue to give a free hand to the politicians while they are harassed under the same rules.

Debates and analysis will more vigorously speculate whether the trio by-elections in which the NPP is the biggest winner, the UDP second winner and Congress is the chief loser, are the semi-finals of 2023. The MDA coalition partners will hope so while the Congress will insist otherwise. A neutral observer may opt for a 'no' opinion as the resources of the present government will be spread all over the 60 constituencies in 2023 as opposed to the confined territories of the two in East Khasi Hills and the one in West Garo Hills. But who knows?

(Email: albert.thyrniang74@gmail.com)

## A case against The Firecracker

By Ishan Chauhan

Every year with the 'festive season' comes the debate about the use of fireworks and as the season ends so does the discussion. Firecrackers, now available even in electronic varieties, are used as a mark of celebration especially, for Dussehra, the victory of good over evil, for Diwali, the return of prince Rama to his homeland. The argument in support of loud bursts of firecrackers over days is that they are a part of the celebration of the festivals which have both religious and traditional significance. No argument against these two points where Dussehra and Diwali are concerned, the question is does the firecracker have religious or traditional importance? And do we really need them?

Do fireworks form a part of Dussehra and Diwali celebrations? History has shown that fireworks coming to India must have been somewhere around 1400 CE. Fireworks and pyrotechnic shows existed as forms of royal entertainment in many Indian kingdoms in the Middle Ages mostly during special occasions like weddings. The late historian P.K. Gode in his "History of Fireworks in India between 1400 and 1900," suggests that the use of fireworks must have started after about 1400 AD, coinciding with the use of gunpowder in warfare.

Gunpowder, a primary ingredient in fireworks, was actually an accidental invention by medieval Chinese alchemists in the tenth or eleventh century. The terrifying flash and blast of gunpowder gave it the name 'devil's distillate.' Gajapati Prataparudradeva, a royal author of the sixteenth century from Orissa, included manufacturing formulas for fireworks and described pyrotechnic mixtures in his Sanskrit book Kautukachintamani. Historians have considered the possibility that Chinese pyrotechnic formulas were brought to India around 1400 AD and then substituted with local products when the need arose.

Historically, though fireworks may have been around since the fifteenth century they were not assimilated into Diwali celebrations till much later, being generally reserved for events hosted by the gentry or the aristocracy. Paintings, as late as 1700 CE do not depict the use of fireworks indicating their absence. Vasudha Narayanan, a professor of religion, from the University of Florida says that it was only in the last century or so that fireworks became a part of this festival. The story of the festival of Diwali arises out of the Ramayana, written approximately around the 5th Century BCE, so a hundred years is a minuscule time frame to make a case for fireworks. While Narayanan understands the need to celebrate festivals, she also raises concerns about the already polluted air getting worse with the amount of fireworks released during Diwali. Celebration and traditions should be revisited if they "cause violence to someone else's health" says Narayanan.

In any case, after the pandemic arguments about history, tradition and religion haven't held. Last year, a number of States imposed a ban on the sale of firecrackers ahead of the festivities due to the rising Covid cases and the irritant of growing air pollution. New Delhi which has a high level of air pollution, has banned the sale, use and storage of firecrackers for the third year now in a bid to control air contaminants. The bans by States have led to many complaints that Diwali without fireworks is not Diwali anymore and amounted to celebrating Christmas without a Christmas tree.

Diwali should be celebrated without noisy, air polluting crackers is also the position held by the Calcutta

High Court. Last Friday (Oct 29) the High Court ordered a blanket ban on firecrackers, including green crackers that the West Bengal government had allowed for Kali puja, Diwali and Chhath puja celebrations. The High Court banned the sale, purchase and use of all firecrackers till December 31 this year to curb air pollution during the pandemic which is still infecting people and taking lives. The court order noted that it would be difficult to distinguish between normal polluting crackers and green crackers that the State government had allowed just a few days earlier. However, the fireworks are back after the Supreme Court on Monday (November 01) set aside the High Court ban.

The decision to set aside the ban on firecrackers comes not so long after the apex court had ruled against the use of fireworks. In September, hearing a plea by the manufacturers' association of firecrackers, the Supreme Court had said that it cannot infringe the right to life of citizens "under the guise of employment of few". The judges had ruled that suitable orders would be passed if green crackers were found acceptable by experts. The court had said that there had to be a balance between employment, unemployment and health and lives of people. "We have to strike the balance between employment, unemployment and the right to life of the citizen. Under the guise of employment of few we cannot permit others to infringe the right to life of other citizens." A bench of Justices M.R. Shah and A.S. Bopanna had said, emphasising that the court's prime focus is the "right to life of innocent citizens".

However, there has always been the supportive argument that firecrackers provide a livelihood to over a million workers in India engaged directly in the manufacture of the incendiary products, or in allied sectors. Sivakasi in Tamil Nadu, has more than 1000 units employing over 800,000 workers directly and indirectly. Sivakasi which is about 500 km south of Chennai is the centre of the trade, accounting for 80% of the Indian fireworks business which is estimated upward of Rs.10,000 crore. Firecrackers are a significant part of Diwali sales so should the business fold, especially in India's highest tax paying small town? This question has been pushing the case for firecrackers, while health and safety considerations push them out.

The advent of the "green" cracker may not assuage safety concerns as COVID is primarily a respiratory disease, and the fact is that people have suffered lung related problems even months after their tryst with the virus. Besides, the sixth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) talks about the concentration of air pollutants increasing significantly over India, and the situation is so, that even if effective decarbonisation techniques are implemented, the levels cannot be brought down to those advocated by the World Health Organisation. In other words, it is absolutely essential to drastically cut down short term climate pollutants. Black carbon, which is one of the components in fireworks, is one such pollutant.

Medieval Chinese alchemists were looking out for life-lengthening elixirs when they invented gunpowder. It certainly hasn't lengthened lives, and their creation makes a strong case for keeping out the firecracker.

(The writer is an independent researcher and author (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@the-billionpress.org)

### Letters to the Editor

#### JRDO Mains result

Editor,  
As was elucidated by the writers of the letter, 'Whither JRDO Mains result', pertaining to the unacceptable late declaration of the Mains examination result, it can be further pointed out, that the higher ranking officials heading the C&RD department are IAS officers, and they entered the All India Government service through the UPSC/ CSE. Besides being a transparent, time bound, efficient agency, UPSC is one of very few agencies which has managed to preserve its reputation of fairness, objectivity and impartiality.

That being said, the candidates expect leniency, performance and an ethical recruitment process from such officials (UPSC has provided them a platform to be in the positions they're in, at present) to make sure this recruitment is managed efficiently, without causing unnecessary delays in the recruitment process. Alas! There is no accountability and these are tough times.

The few times it is able to do so, should the recruitment get stalled for years? Is that acceptable?

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request  
Shillong

#### Access to drinking water a fundamental right

Editor,  
Although there has been some sort of vaccine for the Covid-19 virus, there does not seem to be any remedy to cure the sickly PHE Department and its failure to provide water to the residents of Shillong. Much has been written and reported on this issue and the Greater Shillong Water Supply Scheme which seems to be mired in controversies. But this Department is deaf to the complaints of citizens because the wealthy have learnt to live without PHE water and to buy water delivered by tankers. It's the ordinary people who cannot afford to buy water that are suffering the inefficiencies of the PHE Department. When the Prime Minister is speaking about the Jal Jeevan Mission and being able to access water in our homes is a fundamental right, we have

suffered neglect for years.

For three decades or more we have been hearing about the augmentation of the Greater Shillong Water Supply Scheme but till date nothing seems to work and no one raises any questions about this perennial problem in the Assembly. All the MLAs are mum on this, including the seven MLAs representing the Greater Shillong areas. If the MLAs representing us don't raise these issues then why are we electing them in the first place?

We need people with intellect and vision to serve the PHE Department but are there such people? We only get to hear of promises made which are never fulfilled. If we don't get assured water supply into our homes it is time to come out and protest. If there can be protests for so many issues then why not for water, which is life itself?

Yours etc.,  
A concerned citizen!  
Name withheld on request

#### Climate concerns

Editor,  
The COP26 conference has kicked off in Glasgow. Several earth-shaking speeches have been made by advocates for climate action in view of the rise in

the earth's temperatures at a deadly rate. This has caused climate-induced storms, flash floods, very heavy rainfall in some places and droughts in others. While the Glasgow meet is critical what can be expected is that the developed countries would seek to push for a solution that is weighted in their favour. Developed countries have stronger economies, more financial resources, smaller populations and more advanced technology. Their ability to transition to a green economy is much easier, without compromising their high consumption lifestyles. Over time they have succeeded in shifting the primary burden of responsibility away from themselves to the developing countries increasingly.

In terms of climate finance to developing countries over the years since COP began, about 80 percent is in the form of loans and not grants. According to available information, rich countries gave just \$12.5 billion in the form of grants, \$22 billion in loans with better-than-market rates and around \$24 billion in loans with standard market rates. Hence climate finance experts are concerned that a significant amount of budgeted development assistance has been renamed as climate finance. Moreover,

the COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated matters and diverted attention from funding to climate change reversals by burdening the public budgets.

Further, the fact that China and Russia are absent from COP26 means that these two countries don't agree that there is a climate crisis and will not be bound by what those countries at the summit decide. This has happened because of tensions between western countries and China. This will upset the contours of COP26. What happens if some more countries opt out and do what they please? Clearly climate action to reduce impacts of climate change is not a universally accepted idea.

Yours etc.,  
Lorna J Siyem,  
Via email

#### Time for mindset change

Editor  
Idol immersion has been a traditional socio-religious and socio-cultural practice in our Indian society. However, for long we had very little idea about the damage it induces into our highly sensitive natural eco-systems.

The wooden framework and clay models add unnecessary debris into the freshwater ecosystems increasing the load of solid particles in the water.

Furthermore, the toxic lead-based dyes leaching from the dissolving clay idols into water together with non-biodegradable components like aluminium and thermocol artefacts; and biodegradable constituents like jute and cotton fibres, flowers and leaves, camphor, clarified butter, sweat, meat, rice based products etc., are extremely detrimental to the ecosystem. The Biological and Chemical Oxygen Demands, water temperature, pH, turbidity, solid organic matters and bacterial loads are shifted resulting in eutrophication that is highly toxic to aquatic plants and animals. Unless idol immersion is managed and restricted to artificial water bodies to reduce pollution we are contributing to toxicifying rivers every time we dump idols into our fresh and marine water bodies.

Yours etc.,  
Saikat Kumar Basu  
Lethbridge Alberta Canada

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*"Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment."*

— Jim Rohn

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 84 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2021

## Way forward for MDA Government

MEGHALAYA Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma has taken credit for the performance of the three candidates belonging to the coalition partners in the recent by-polls. Now the NPP has added two more MLAs to its kitty and a total of three to the coalition. This victory comes at a time when the Government is facing flak from several quarters, especially after the elimination of the erstwhile general secretary of the militant outfit - HNLC on August 13 last in what appeared to be a fake encounter. The report of the independent investigation into the case by a retired Chief Justice is still pending. In any case, reports for such enquiries take their own time and no one is any the wiser after the first flush of emotions are over and done with. Besides, public memory is short. And that precisely is the point about public reaction. It is always emotionally surcharged and emotions have a short-lived timeline.

While the results of Mawphlang and Mawryngkneng were somewhat predictable, it was the Rajabala outcome that was surprising. Going by the turnover at public rallies it looked as if the Congress was on top of things. But what brought the turnaround? Normally, by-elections have a different outcome in that people tend to vote for development which they believe will only come from the government in the seat of power. Voting for an opposition candidate might only slow down the process of development in that particular constituency. Considering that Rajabala has seen a very slow pace of development under previous MLAs and regimes, if the candidate from the ruling party promises a better development package people would naturally tend towards him than put their stakes in the Congress Party candidate. But it is also a fact that elections are difficult to predict and a by-poll also means that the state machinery is available to the ruling party.

Chief Minister Conrad Sangma who is also the NPP Chief had been camping in Rajabala which in other words meant that he took this election as a personal challenge and so did the leader of the Opposition and former Chief Minister, Dr Mukul Sangma. In this game of thrones between two stalwarts from Garo Hills the younger Sangma seems to have scored over the elder one. Conrad had made a public statement that good governance was what won the day for the MDA. Good governance encompasses several factors and reining in corruption should be at the top of the MDA government's agenda. Conrad has exactly 15 months to prove that he recognises that corruption downgrades good governance.

## Govt unlikely to provide real clues to SC panel

# Pegasus probe: Why a transparent mechanism is imperative

By Paras Nath Singh

The Supreme Court's decision constituting a committee headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice R.V. Raveendran to examine whether Israeli software Pegasus was used to target citizens is indeed significant for it, inter alia recognizes that the right to privacy and freedom of speech are alleged to have been impacted by such targeting of the citizen and that it could potentially have a chilling effect on the exercise of such right.

On the face of it, the order would appear to be paving the way to get to the truth behind the targeting of activists, journalists, politicians, judges and government officials using the Israeli spyware. However, the order failed to address the one pivotal issue: did the Government or any of its agencies buy the spyware from the NSO Group? We know that the Israeli Government vets the NSO Group's sales. And it is also on record that the NSO Group sells its product exclusively to government intelligence and law enforcement agencies to fight crime and terror.

The answer to this question could only be a 'Yes' or 'No'. Given the reluctance of the government, what were the options before the court?

The Central Government through the Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology had filed a "limited affidavit" denying the allegations made in the petitions, saying that they were based on conjectures and surmises, or on unsubstantiated media reports, or incomplete or uncorroborated material and could, therefore, not be the basis for invoking the writ jurisdiction of the court. The affidavit did not shed any light on whether the Central Government had purchased the Pegasus software at all.

The court granted ample opportunity to Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to file a detailed affidavit in the matter, but he chose not to do so. During the hearing, Mehta submitted that whether the government used a particular software for authorized interception could not be the subject matter of a court debate. Mehta urged the court to appreciate the harm it could cause to 'national security' if the government was to disclose whether a particular software was used or not.

The court, while appoint-

ing the committee, said "the State couldn't get a free pass every time, by virtue of its mere mentioning of national security". Logically, it would follow that the court would direct by a binding order the State to provide this information. At that stage, the State could have claimed privilege under Section 123 of the Indian Evidence Act, stating that it was not in the public interest to provide unpublished information. A similar situation arose in the Rafale case where the court took the view that the papers were not "unpublished" since the Hindu had already put them in the public domain. Thus, there was no question of the applicability of section 123.

Senior advocate Shyam Divan, appearing for one of the petitioners, asked that the

department authorizing an interception under Rule 419A of the Indian Telegraph Rules, 1951, the only law which authorizes the interception of devices for stated reasons and check if any of the names of the persons whose phones have been targeted or are in the list of proposed targets appear there.

We now have a list of names of people who are proposed to be targeted by Pegasus. We also have confirmation from the Citizens Lab and Amnesty International of some targeted phones. It would be worthwhile to check if these names appear in the documentation under Rule 419A. The other source, no doubt, would be NSO Group and the State of Israel, but they may not be subject to the jurisdiction of the committee or may even refuse to answer questions anyway.

How far and effectively the committee will be able to make headway is not clear, but an opportunity to hold the government to account by the Supreme Court has been lost.

The Supreme Court has given the committee liberty to devise its own procedure to effectively implement and answer the terms of reference set by it. It is authorized by the court to hold such enquiry as it may deem fit, and as indicated above, it can take the statement of any person in connection with the enquiry and call for the records of any authority or individual.

It may be recalled that in 2019, the global messaging giant WhatsApp Inc. identified vulnerability in its software that enabled Pegasus spyware to infiltrate the devices of WhatsApp's users. The Supreme Court has also directed the committee to enquire into what investigation was made pursuant to this disclosure in 2019. The disclosure followed a lawsuit filed in a US federal court in San Francisco in which WhatsApp alleged that the Israeli NSO Group targeted some 1,400 WhatsApp users with Pegasus.

As far back as 2019, lawyers defending the human rights activists arrested in the controversial Bhima Koregaon (BK) case had confirmed that Pegasus targeted their phones. It has also come on record that at least eight of the BK accused were on the list of potential targets. (IPA Service)

The most obvious records to be checked would be the records of orders of the Secretary of the relevant



Cabinet Secretary be directed to file an affidavit to answer these questions. Indeed during the arguments, counsel for the parties whose phones were, in fact, targeted stated that national security would be threatened by the targeting of their phones, and security would be best protected by an inquiry into the question of who purchased the spyware and against whom it was used.

Though the Supreme Court has authorized the committee to take statements of any person in connection with the inquiry and call for the records of any authority or individual, it has not ex-

amined the merit of the claim of the central government for withholding the information on the purchase of the spyware. The Centre may even deny the information citing section 123 of the Evidence Act as this issue has remained undecided by the court.

The deadlock at the G20 assumes special significance in the light of the ongoing UNFCCC Conference at Glasgow called COP26. The summit keeps alive many hopes related to climate change. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned that the pledges signed on by the G20 were insufficient and said that they put the COP summit in jeopardy. While the G20's commitment to 1.5 degrees Celsius is a good move, lack of specifics makes it uncertain. Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggested at the G20 that developed nations should provide 1% of their GDP as finance for green projects in developing economies. He drew attention to the injustice of pressing the developed countries for greater climate ambition without any climate

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## Deepavali Release

# For people or pandemic?

By Dr S. Saraswathi

Caught between fear of third wave of Covid-19 and the need to restore our economy and our irresistible desire to participate and celebrate social festivals with usual enthusiasm, governments and people everywhere in the country are in a peculiar mood. Festivals like Navaratri and Deepavali celebrated all over the country and which even attract non-Hindus and went off on a low key with limited lockdown in 2020 are eagerly awaited this year by young and old alike to be back in usual glamour. Still there are pessimists picturing to themselves post-Deepavali behaviour of the pandemic - all in black. Precautions in place and the response of the people provide a mixed picture of hope and despair.

Needless to mention that crowds have proved to be super spreaders of the pandemic and so crowd collecting occasions have become the targets of attack. Hence, containing crowds is one of the principal measures in socially fighting the disease -- a method directly striking at the roots of all festivals. There is no festival that is celebrated in solo or in silence. Most places of worship are most noisy places in India and biggest crowd gathering sites. Worship is a form and occasion of social gathering.

The connection between mega gathering events, abbreviated as MGEs, and spread of Corona-19 is not just based on commonsense, but proved by a survey of several events in various countries including China, Malaysia, Spain, France, Germany, Switzerland, and Jordan. Such events are characterized by "concentration of large population at a specific place for a specific purpose" making it impossible for organizers and crowd controllers to enforce order which in the present pandemic situation includes observance of Covid-19 regulations.

Lockdown is mainly intended to prevent human contact. But no nation's economy can withstand long closure of normal economic activities. Closure of educational institutions for whole years will impact physical, mental, social, and intellectual state of children and youth. The challenge today is to restore routine pre-Covid-19 life and activities without re-opening the doors to the pandemic, i.e. re-integrating ourselves with our normal life and simultaneously disassociating from Covid-19. It means that we have to lift lockdown and should not crowd, but have a merry Deepavali and other festivals. Is this possible?

Reports have appeared in the press that some States were showing signs of a spike in Covid-19 infections after Dusshera celebrations. West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu reported increase in the number of positive cases as well as death compared to the decline recorded earlier. Absolute number, however, was not showing alarming increase. Findings of a study by the International Institute of Population Studies show that life expectancy has declined by two years for both men and women in India taking away the improvement recorded in the last decades. It is a serious matter but the impact may not last long. For, life expectancy keeps changing and reduces fast in times of epidemics. Premature deaths are temporary and stray cases and are not likely to alter death rates or age structure of the population or cause of death with long term effect.

Some scientists are of the opinion that a new mutated form of Covid-19 causing Corona virus (AY 4.2) that caused panic in Europe and spreading rapidly in the UK as more contagious than Delta is present in India also but in very low numbers. The matter is still under investigation and severity and risk factors have to be verified. Some cases of the new variant, reported from Indore, is cause of concern in view of the current festival season and unmanageable crowding. Coinciding with Deepavali

festival is our decision to reopen classes I to VIII in schools from 1 November under detailed regulations and strict enforcement with schools given freedom to conduct classes in the way best suited to them.

All States meaning governments and people presently seem to be happy to be relieved of lockdown restrictions. Their worry is more about financial loss than health problem.

Prime Minister Modi has advised people to celebrate festivals with utmost restraint in view of the ongoing pandemic stressing that there is no reason to be care-free. Mentioning about our success in administering 100 crore doses of anti-Covid vaccines which is a world record, he reminded people that this is no reason to be complacent about Covid-19 protocols. "Having a strong kavach (armour) does not mean that people should let down their guard", he said.

This advice that was given as soon as the pandemic was traced in India has to be sounded again and again because people's seriousness in adhering to prescribed behaviour is broadly related to the degree of lockdown restrictions. Less restrictions is taken as less threat of the pandemic and removal of restrictions will invariably be understood as zero threat of the epidemic in the country.

With Deepavali crowds at shopping areas grow thicker and thicker in all cities and towns. Social distancing guidelines are thrown away. Common mentality is that this festival comes only once a year, but guidelines can be picked up again.

It refuses to realise that it is not the decline in the risk factor of the Corona virus, but the economic compulsion that is behind opening of activities. For the common people, lifting lockdown means permitting gatherings and festivals.

There are sections in the governments also keen to promote celebration of festivals with more and more facilities to please people and speak more about relaxations and removal of lockdown than on the need to adhere to Covid-19 norms like maintaining social distance thus leaving the Prime Minister almost alone to campaign for restraint in celebrations.

Thus, the Southern Railway, for instance, has decided to add unreserved compartments in some trains: We know what it means -- packed trains and footboard passengers. Theatres are allowed to run shows with house-full audience. Bars and night clubs are open. It seems that selective restrictions will be resented and may even be legally fought. People forget that fighting Corona virus is neither politics nor a religious question. It is a public health crisis.

The term "social gathering" is used in the context of the spread of Covid-19. According to the WHO, an event counts as a mass gathering "if the number of people it brings together is so large that it has the potential to strain the planning and response resources of the health system in the community where it takes place." The location, duration, and number of participants in the event are crucial features. WHO attributed rise in Corona virus cases in Europe in July to EURO 2020 Football Matches and functioning of pubs and bars in the host cities. If the same yardstick is applied, Deepavali shopping crowd and temple festivals where thousands of people gather without moving space are social gatherings.

Social-religious events, which are utmost priorities in life, have become the deciding factor in following Covid-19 norms since the crisis situation has ended. If we lose balanced thinking and sense of proportion, Deepavali release will not be for us from the pandemic but for Covid-19 from attackers. --INFA

(The writer is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

## Letters to the Editor

### Of killer highways

Editor,  
Apropos of the letter 'Decrepit - Accident Prone Highway' by Omarka Laloo (ST October 26, 2021), I would like to add some of my points which I think are relevant to the present condition of the so-called National Highway 6. For the first time as a regular commuter between Shillong and Jowai and for the past four decades of my life I have never seen such a road (if one can call it a road at all) and I think it is one of the worst highways in India. The road is full of potholes, dangerous potholes that have recently caused an accident to a fine young man while trying to avoid the holes while on his way to Shillong on a two-wheeler. Not only that but the road is pathetic also risky and very uncomfortable for older people, pregnant women, and for those with back pain and other health conditions. Throughout the summer or monsoon season one can even fish from the ditches that are full of water pools whenever there is a traffic jam.

This is due to the fact that trucks with load of 30 to 40 metric tonnes are plying through this road on a regular basis. This includes coal-laden trucks, cement loaded trucks and other big trucks of more than 24 tyres carrying huge grills, iron, tankers, etc. to Silchar/Aizawl and Agar-

tala. It is high time that these trucks should ply through Assam (Karbi Anglong) and not pass through Meghalaya. Crores of rupees are spent every year for repairing these roads and it is seen that the carpeting is only half an inch thick which hardly lasts for 6 - 8 months. The whole stretch of this road right from Khliehriat to Shillong should be cemented (about 2 feet of thickness) so that no repairing work is required for the next 10 years. Also there is need to put a stop to the corruption by unscrupulous PWD Engineers and contractors who are minting crores of rupees from these highways every year.

We have more than 10 cement factories that are producing over 5000 metric tonnes of cement per factory per day. Where is the 2% money from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) deposited by these cement factories to the government for the last 10 years which will be more than Rs. 5000 crores. Where has this money gone? I believe the public deserve to know! Each factory can supply to the Government (through CSR money) about 50,000 to 1,00,000 metric tonnes of cement for the purpose of road construction. The work should be done by NHAI, Government of India enterprises, not by State PWD, then one can see the difference in quality and travel smoothly or comfortably from Khliehriat/Jowai to Shillong. If this proposal

is implemented, all the commuters will thank me for this suggestion.

Yours etc.,  
L. Dikhar,  
Jowai

### MDA needs to tackle corruption

Editor

The MDA coalition at its inception was looked at with doubts and reservations by critics. They questioned how a government with different political parties cobbled together could achieve anything worthwhile when each party had its own objectives and agenda. However, four years down the line this government under the leadership of Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma has been able to prove not just by words but in action as well that it has the political will to try and resolve a lot of pending issues. The inter-state border dispute with Assam or the encroachment of land by Bangladesh or even the law and order matters related to the Sweeper's Colony in the heart of Shillong are just some of the issues that need a lot of political will translated into action in the process. Sadly, for the past 49 years these issues have not been realistically dealt with by successive governments. These issues were actually used as political propaganda by the Congress Party and by some politicians at the helm

of affairs. We hope more action would follow in aspects related to corruption as well, if at all as what was claimed that "Good" Governance was the reason for winning all three seats in the bye-polls.

Yours etc...  
Dominic Stadlin  
Wankhar  
Shillong

### Don't frustrate the youth

Editor

Last month, the District Selection Committee of Baghmara conducted the physical test and typing test for the post of Gram Sevak, Soil & Water Conservation demonstrator, LDA etc. This letter is to highlight the poorly conducted physical test. It was mentioned in the admit card that candidates should be present at 5 o'clock in the morning while the concerned authority themselves showed up only past 6 o'clock without having made any prior arrangements for the event. Now my main contention and that of many others as well is that people who had finished second, third and in the first top 20 during the running test, somehow didn't appear in the recently declared results. Mind you, these people were qualified on every front. They should have been selected for the subsequent test. Instead of bickering among ourselves, I'm writing this to shed some light on how the system or the concerned authorities

are failing us, the youth, in providing a just and transparent process. Based on these considerations we feel the Baghmara DSC needs some scrutiny otherwise we will lose all faith in the whole system. We can't remain silent on what's happening right in front of our eyes. I'm sure the situation is not unique to only Baghmara DSC.

Those in authority, please understand the helplessness of the youth of Meghalaya!

Yours etc.,  
Chanangbil Marak,  
Via email

### COP26 events and action thereafter

Editor,

The 2021 edition of the United Nations Annual Climate Change Conference began in Glasgow after the end of a meeting of the G20 grouping. The leaders of the G20 nations reached a consensus about fighting climate change. However, the uncompromising stance adopted by several members of the G20 is clearly a signpost to the future. They could not come to a compromise over several issues related to climate change such as ending financing of coal-fired power plants, climate neutrality for domestic economies, domestic use of coal and so on. It is ironic that the G20 countries that account for 75% of the world's emissions disagree on climate related issues.

The deadlock at the G20 assumes special significance in the light of the ongoing UNFCCC Conference at Glasgow called COP26. The summit keeps alive many hopes related to climate change. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned that the pledges signed on by the G20 were insufficient and said that they put the COP summit in jeopardy. While the G20's commitment to 1.5 degrees Celsius is a good move, lack of specifics makes it uncertain. Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggested at the G20 that developed nations should provide 1% of their GDP as finance for green projects in developing economies. He drew attention to the injustice of pressing the developed countries for greater climate ambition without any climate

finance. Against this backdrop, the COP's focus on climate finance assumes great significance. On the other hand, the failure of the G20 summit to put in efforts to mitigate climate change is not a good sign for COP26. As the G20 fell short of expectations, chances of a breakthrough at the COP summit are very slim.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Kollam

Letters to the Editor must have the full name, address and contact number of the writer, even if they are sent by email. Only letters with the requisite details will be published.

"Never regret anything you have done with a sincere affection; nothing is lost that is born of the heart."

— Basil Rathbone

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 85 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2021

### Cycle of corruption

CORRUPTION, by now, has become a way of life in India. While this was one of the campaign planks of Narendra Modi when he sought to take power as Prime Minister and ousted the UPA II government at the Centre in 2014, nothing in the seven years of his government goes to show he is serious about checking this social evil. Reports this week saying benami properties worth over Rs 1,000 crore linked to Maharashtra's deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar were attached by the Income Tax department were quickly denied by his office. The government is keeping quiet.

The fact remains that the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) led by Sharad Pawar has been in the news for several years for a whole lot of alleged corrupt deals. The ongoing bar bribe case in the state is an example, in which NCP leader Anil Deshmukh was removed from the state home minister's post and is now arrested by the Enforcement Directorate. This, after a top Mumbai cop alleged Deshmukh had asked the police to collect Rs 100 crore as bribe by way of extortion from restaurant and bar owners in the western metropolis every month. The shadow of it leapt up to an explosion near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence. Now, it would appear that the cop has been silenced. He is refusing to give more evidence. The case might end up in a whimper. Regional entities like the Shiv Sena and the NCP are calling much of the shots in the state. The saffron party's failures in governance led to its loss of power in Maharashtra; and predictably the two regional parties are having a whale of a time.

This brings us to the question as to what change the seven-years of the Modi governance has brought to our lives. In state after state, vested interests are digging themselves deeper and subverting established systems. A bonus during the UPA terms was the perceptible economic well-being for the nation, thanks largely to Dr Manmohan Singh. Had he controlled the free-wheeling corruption, the fate of the Congress party would not have been what it is today. Investors are hesitating to put their money into new ventures as they have to pay through their noses to bureaucrats and politicians to get the necessary permissions. The manufacturing sector is thus ailing and India's dependence on China for even ordinary household wares is growing. The Licence Raj, which was supposed to have ended from the time of Liberalization in 1991, is showing up in myriad new ways. Less of industries here means less of job opportunities too.

# Meghalaya Congress : A lost cause

By Patricia Mukhim

After the frenetic campaign for the three Assembly seats the Congress drew a blank. On the day of the counting when the MPCC President should be around to comfort his confreres who lost in the by-polls, he was in Glasgow photographed with Prime Minister Modi. Mr Pala happens to be the Conventor of the Parliamentary Committee on Climate which according to him is meant to advise the Prime Minister of India on what to say and what not to say at the COP26 summit. Was it important for Mr Pala to be at Glasgow? Well, that's a question that the Shillong Lok Sabha MP is best placed to answer. The working President of the Party, Ampareen Lyngdoh did brief the media but the absence of the Party Chief left many Congress workers feeling orphaned. It's not a good feeling to lose elections; not especially for the candidates. Mawryngkneng candidate, Highlander Kharmalki did not speak to the media on learning of his loss. Nor did Ms Hashina Mondal of Rajabala. Kennedy Khyriem who contested from Mawphlang gave his bytes to the media and said he never expected that his rival, Eugeneon would outdo him by over 4000 votes.

Congress party workers seem a dejected lot. An MLA who did not wish to be quoted said the infighting in the party (Mukul versus Pala controversy) played a role in their defeat since people were unsure of voting a Party whose leadership is under contest. Moreover, the campaign itself was negative in tone and tenor. The Congress did not offer an alternative vision. All it did was to lambast the NPP and the MDA coalition. Beyond a point, negativity sucks. People want to know what a candidate will do for the constituency when he/she is elected. There is something in the human spirit that tends to feel compassion for a candidate that's being ridiculed or verbally assaulted for no good reason but just because he/she belongs to a rival party. So, the Congress campaign largely backfired.

The Congress as has always been the case does not practice inner-party democracy and that starts at the top. The undemocratic manner of giving tickets to candidates that are pulled into the Party at the eleventh hour, often without consultation with the Block Presidents and literally dumping candidates on them is what has made the cookie crumble for the Congress. At the national level there is that section that wants a more democratic process in electing the Party President but they have been treated as intruders into the Nehru-Gandhi dynastic ar-

angement. In a sense the Congress is no different from the BJP, in that the Party expects absolute compliance to the supreme leader — in this case Sonia Gandhi who continues to pull the strings, with Rahul Gandhi remaining the unwilling president who could not lead the party to victory in election after election. The BJP's standard quip that as long as Rahul Gandhi is at the helm, the BJP is in a comfortable position, should have made the Party reflect on the meaning and intent of the above punch line. But reflection has never

simply does not happen. This time a lot of money changed hands and from all parties contesting the polls. Intelligent voters got their pound of flesh including some who jumped ship post-midnight to support some other candidate after having pledged allegiance to one candidate at public meetings. Those who believe there's anything like a clean election live in a world of make-believe. Money talks. Period.

The Conrad-Pala-Kharlukhi bond is also troubling for many Congress party workers who are intuitive



been a strong point with any political party, least of all the Congress.

Now after the by-polls there are rumours flying thick and fast that Dr Mukul Sangma will be leaving the Congress (I use the word rumours with some because that's what happens in politics. Rumours only coalesce

enough to comprehend that there's more than just a 'friendship' with one and a 'filial' bond with the other. Politics is a strange game and anyone who has joined this game knows that political calculations and political survival matter more than loyalty to any single party. People walk in and walk

*"Congress party workers seem a dejected lot. An MLA who did not wish to be quoted said the infighting in the party (Mukul versus Pala controversy) played a role in their defeat since people were unsure of voting a Party whose leadership is under contest. Moreover, the campaign itself was negative in tone and tenor. The Congress did not offer an alternative vision."*

when the actors have joined a new Party or created a new party a la Captain Amarinder Singh) and join the TMC along with other MLAs. Rumours are also afloat that some Congress MLAs might join the UDP and others the NPP. So, then what's left of the Congress in Meghalaya? It's never a good idea for politicians to be in the Opposition for too long; not in a system where hard cash makes sense. To speak about fighting elections on principles is wishful thinking. It

out of political parties and we as voters should neither be critical of such people or indeed expect politicians to have scruples.

Coming to the Congress Party one can say with some amount of certainty that this is a Party whose narrative has run its course. Today the Party is unsure if it stands for anything. To be a secular party the Congress needs to be completely neutral in its treatment of all religious faith. It cannot be tilted towards the minorities because that is precisely why

the majority Hindus in this country feel they have been cheated by the Congress and are supporting the BJP with a vengeance. I agree with the poll strategist Prashant Kishor that the BJP is not going away any time soon and that the Congress should come to terms with this fact. 2024 will go the BJP way because the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya will be a big draw. The BJP has positioned itself as the vanguard of Hindu pride and despite all that Modi has done such as the Demonetisation and the CAA the BJP still has not lost its constituencies. There are many who expect 2022 to bring reversals for the BJP in Goa, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Manipur and Gujarat. But by the time the election clock ticks the BJP would have used its election machinery to the hilt even while the Congress continues to falter on its leadership.

In life as in politics, change is the only thing constant but nothing has changed in the Congress since the time of Indira Gandhi. She didn't believe in inner-party democracy because she was insecure and rightly so after facing the kind of dissensions she did. But which leader doesn't face dissension? Leaders are called so because they know to handle discords and to bring consensus through consultations not through impositions of their writ. The Congress's Achilles Heel is in its appointment of State level presidents. The Congress High Command sends its emissaries many of whom don't understand the politics in the states they visit other than cursory feedback. These emissaries come and consult with a few people at the top after which they give their feedback. We don't hear of AICC bigwigs consulting grass-roots workers if only to show that the consultative process is democratic. If there are elections to the Primary units and the Block Congress then why should there not be voting for the Pradesh President? This is what has created a power centre in the Congress. Those close to the AICC also get to become Pradesh Presidents. Of course, the same is true of the BJP too where Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah take all important decisions for the Party. It is a reality of life that power is a passage to the absolutism of the chosen ones; the me-alone leaders. But this creates dystopia that trickles down and the discontent just multiplies. This discontent will afflict the BJP too unless it mends its ways.

The Congress is already facing a dystopia lumped over a long period. A dystopia that has aggravated after remaining out of power. The change in weather events, which have become quite frequent in recent years in the country range from climate change to anthropogenic commissions such as cutting down of mountains, indiscriminate felling of trees, stone quarrying in ecologically sensitive zones, conversions of paddy field that used to absorb rains, the mining of river beds, razing hills for indiscriminate construction, mono crop cultivation and so on. One may refer to Madhav Gadgil's report way back in 2011 that predicted the possible calamities that would be caused by the destruction of the Western Ghats on account of encroachment, quarrying and other factors. But political parties of all hues worked together to reject the report to appease vote banks.

In an article in Nature in 2013, it had cautioned that rising temperatures in the Himalayas raise the threat of glacial floods. Of the 8800 glacial lakes in the Himalayas, over 200 have been classified as 'dangerous'. Himalayan nations were urged to build an international network to monitor risks such as those from glacial lakes and give early warning of hazards. The landslides in the Himalayan river catch-

## COP26 & India Weather events daunting

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

As the COP26 Summit at Glasgow kicked off, the struggle of reaching an agreement to keep the world on a 1.5-degree trajectory of rising temperatures, stares world leaders in the face. With reports suggesting that emissions are increasing at a fast pace, the obvious result is the increase in extreme weather events, as seen with stormy weather sweeping the United Kingdom bringing suspected tornadoes to parts of the country.

At the opening session, UN climate chief Patricia Espinosa confessed that the task of swiftly shifting the world's economy onto a greener trajectory, to avoid increasingly deadly climate impacts, was enormously difficult. "The transition we need is beyond the scope, scale and speed of anything humanity has accomplished in the past. It is a daunting task. But humanity is a species defined by its ingenuity," she said. What way forward it finds eventually, obviously will be closely watched.

At the home front, arriving in Glasgow for the Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted he looked forward to working with other world leaders on mitigating climate change and articulating India's efforts in this regard. Well-intentioned alright, but strategy needs a re-look or sharp refining. Recent events of torrential rain and floods in Uttarakhand and Kerala recently bear testimony to the fact that climate change can play havoc with the weather, resulting in loss of innumerable lives. It goes without saying that like most governments, India too has taken nature for granted as a result of which such developments are occurring time and again.

While global leaders try to find solutions, a recent report of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), projected that the world's greenhouse gas emissions will fall by only 7.5 percent by 2030 under currently pledged national emission lowering actions instead of 30 percent required to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius. The voluntary pledges of respective countries will place the world on track for a global temperature rise of 2.70 C, it pointed out.

The report found that India along with several other G20 countries are expected to release more earth warming emissions during 2030 than they did in 2010. This is despite all the actions reported to have been taken by the Indian government to reduce pollution and also its high profile publicity of focusing on non-renewable energy.

The change in weather events, which have become quite frequent in recent years in the country range from climate change to anthropogenic commissions such as cutting down of mountains, indiscriminate felling of trees, stone quarrying in ecologically sensitive zones, conversions of paddy field that used to absorb rains, the mining of river beds, razing hills for indiscriminate construction, mono crop cultivation and so on. One may refer to Madhav Gadgil's report way back in 2011 that predicted the possible calamities that would be caused by the destruction of the Western Ghats on account of encroachment, quarrying and other factors. But political parties of all hues worked together to reject the report to appease vote banks.

In an article in Nature in 2013, it had cautioned that rising temperatures in the Himalayas raise the threat of glacial floods. Of the 8800 glacial lakes in the Himalayas, over 200 have been classified as 'dangerous'. Himalayan nations were urged to build an international network to monitor risks such as those from glacial lakes and give early warning of hazards. The landslides in the Himalayan river catch-

ments are well-known and are triggered by a plethora of natural and man-made factors such as heavy rainfall, earthquake, deforestation, large-scale land use changes and so on.

Similar to the Rishiganga disaster, the destructive 1970 floods that caused devastation in the Ganga Valley also lay in the Rishiganga watershed. The question arises — why do we suffer death and destruction despite available scientific information? Experts believe, and quite rightly, that investment in proactive scientific approaches — natural hazard surveillance or flood forecasting — to prevent disasters is missing. The other concern is that our policy makers do not appear to take cognizance of good science and implement recommendations of scientists, at least with regard to disaster management.

One may refer here to a study by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) which, in consultation with the Centre for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters (CREED), found that India suffered economic losses of \$80 billion during the 20-year period of 1998 to 2017. India has been ranked among the world's top four countries in absolute economic losses, the others being US, China and Japan. The losses increased by over 120 percent in the last 20 years compared to the preceding two decades (1978-1997).

If losses from climate related disasters are taken into account, they have gone up by 151 percent. India has been found to be the worst sufferer of disaster related deaths and economic losses. Thousands of lives are lost and hundreds of crores worth of properties destroyed every year, though not all of them are reported, a fact authenticated by the UN report.

The lack of government action has once again become a reality this year though scientific studies and international reports have urged the need to take remedial action. As mentioned earlier, the government is not much interested in adhering to advice of experts in tackling adverse weather events, specially floods, cyclones and landslides which mostly affect the poor living in mountainous regions and coastal areas.

It may be pertinent here to refer to an US intelligence assessment which identified India and Pakistan among 11 countries that are 'highly vulnerable' in their ability to prepare for and respond to environmental and societal crises caused by climate change. This first ever US National Intelligence Estimate on climate stated that India and China will play crucial roles in determining the trajectory of global temperature rise while glossing over the West's contribution to the crisis. "China and India are the first and fourth largest emitters respectively, and low carbon sources and both are growing their total and per capita emissions whereas the US and the EU — as the second and third largest — are declining", the report observed while acknowledging both countries are incorporating more renewable sources into the energy mix.

The introduction of environmental assessments in the Himalayas would protect the fragility of the mountains and address concerns about providing economic incentives to local people without harming the environment. Compensation afforestation programmes funded by hydropower corporations need to be effectively monitored. These activities must mandatorily involve local communities, civil society organizations and women's self-help groups for meaningful results. The relocation of vulnerable villages and imposition of penalties for erecting structures on river banks are also necessary. --INFA

### Letters to the Editor

#### Dangers lurking on NH-6

Editor,  
The NH 6, the new name for NH 44, has now turned a killer stretch from its entry from Assam in the North to the village of Ratacherra before entering the North Cachar plains of the Barak valley. Sad to say that the real NH from Guwahati ends at Lad Umroi, where one could safely drive as it possesses the most needed central divider, in the absence of which any head-on collision with these heavily overloaded trucks (I fail now to trust the weigh bridge licentiated or not) speeding with 12 and 16 wheelers means death to all occupants in small plastic defended small cars. And from Mawryngkneng to Ratacherra the stretch is nothing short of potholes at every metre or two letting ducks and ducklings to swim

around. Why this terrible state of affairs? The answer has to be given by the NHAI. About 12 years ago, someone had made a petition to the then CE.P.W.D (roads). The complaint was that these 12 & 16 wheelers from either side of our state of Meghalaya never shed the load they carry from the plains. The 2518 TATA factory permissible axle load is 25 tons (the nomenclature tells) and MOT GOI allows 25% concession that sums up to 25+7= 32 tons. In short, assuming they do not overload, the torque on the metalled road is not great. But in hilly areas like ours with the world's notorious gradients the torque on our bitumen surface is far beyond its strength no matter how well the PWD performs its job. In the absence of double differentials (dumper trucks have such), our sloping roads are tortured and with monsoon these heavily twisted roads turn into potholes. If left unattended the

stretch from Mawryngkneng to Ratacherra would have to be closed for all vehicles.

The saddest news is that this NH 6 has now also turned into a 'Killing Spree Stretch.' From Lad Umroi to Bymihai, how many of our bikers or two-wheeler drivers were killed on the stretch with no one ever knowing the culprit? At Sohshrieh not long ago, a Mahindra pickup vehicle suffered engine problems. The people returning from their paddy fields tried to push it to the side for repairs. A truck hit them and about four people perished on the spot. As always the enquiry died a natural death. On such occasions insurance agents who are notorious for clicking their cameras on smashed bumpers or twisted doors than on smashed heads are never present while good Samaritans who happened to be passers-by frantically await the nearest kith and kin to come and settle payments with the hospital authorities concerned.

Last week a traffic policeman at 8th mile East Jaintia Hills was mauled by a truck and seriously injured. One person on a scooter was run over and killed a day after. These are few incidents that could be highlighted within the space constraints in these columns.

What sort of country are we living in right now? Windshields, which are a must for all drivers, are fully covered by the posters of celebrities, allowing the poor driver enough space to peep through a peep-hole like the tank drivers in World War-2. Then multi-coloured bulbs are hung on the body and tarpaulin and our DTOs are too busy to realise that they are entangled with the all-important signals of dim red (to tell drivers the sun has set), bright red to warn drivers behind of emergency braking and amber for hazards and direction. And coming face to face with these during lonely nights is

a nightmare. Bumper reinforcements banned by Union Minister Nitin Gadkari are tied to original bumpers. Our youth have to dismantle them right away on roads as ordered by DTOs through the police. But this is NOT applicable for these 12 & 16 wheelers for they have supporters within the State Secretariat.

And think of the babies with delicate ear drums and children who lose their hearing on account of air horns with decibels that are devastatingly loud. In no other country will such devastating horns be allowed. The Transport Department is toying with the Motor Vehicle Act. Had it not been for the traffic police banning the conical alloys, by now many pedestrians would have been crippled.

The Dwarksuid bridge built not by the NHAI finally succumbed to overloads of heavy machinery, tiles, essential products and of

course coal and coke from Sutnga. How the NHAI gave this work to an individual remains a mystery even in the State PWD. Trucks were diverted through Shillong and the Umiam Lake (dam) which just celebrated its golden jubilee in 2017. This is a recipe for disaster should the Umiam bridge collapse under the 50 tons gross weight and heavy engine vibrations. No one bothers about this although the alternative is to use the East-West corridor through Nowgong.

When will NH 6 become safe for motorists to drive comfortably and safely on? Unless this is achieved our lives will be lighter than the feather of a sparrow.

Yours etc.,  
James Kharmih,  
Shillong-1

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"Growth is painful. Change is painful.  
But, nothing is as painful as staying stuck  
where you do not belong."

— N. R. Narayana Murthy

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 86 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2021

### From legislators to service providers

THE Meghalaya state assembly was once represented by stalwarts whose vision encompassed the whole state. Their verbal calisthenics in the Assembly were intellectual gems and the debates were a class apart. The House comprised educated leaders, some of whom were college and university lecturers and professors. They were professionals; not businessmen. That's the biggest difference between then and now. Since the MLAs of the that time owned no businesses and were not contractors they concentrated on law making. While they developed their constituencies; their priority was the State. Today we witness a fall from grace for this Assembly. The structure coming up at the New Shillong Township might be impressive but are its occupants worthy of that space considering the manner in which they were elected?

Money has played and continues to play a key role in the election of candidates. Hardly ever does this calculation go wrong. The electorate have learnt that election time is celebration time. That's the one and only time when people are the masters and politicians vie for their attention. Somebody somewhere started the cash for votes game and it is here to stay. Since the Congress party has ruled Meghalaya for the longest time it is this party that started the cash distribution game. Others only followed suit. The regional parties did not have the kind of cash the Congress had – much of which came from Delhi. Hence the Congress has lost its moral and ethical plank to blame other political parties for using cash to woo voters. The Election Commission of India (ECI) remains a mute spectator to the cash for votes game because the candidates are always one up on it.

Since candidates with money have better chances at winning elections, political parties and their ideologies don't matter. Even election manifestos are passe. Sure, there will be a few ethical souls who will vote for those they believe deserve their votes. But such are too few to make a difference. No wonder those that have the intention to be real lawmakers and who understand what the role of a legislator is are now shying away from politics. Besides, people expect their MLAs to be service providers, serving their personal needs. This is tough for an MLA in the Opposition who only has access to the MLA scheme of Rs 3 crore a year. Any wonder then why MLA scheme is spent at the fag end of the MLA's term? The MLA scheme is used to service people and not to create public assets. On Meghalaya's 49th year we have truly got the MLAs we deserve and things can only slide down from here unless voters decide to be the change they wish to see.

# Facebook's rebranded meta bracing for a dystopian future?

By Prabir Purkayastha

Last week, Zuckerberg at Connect 2021 launched a new company brand Meta. According to Facebook, "...this brings together our apps and technologies under one new company brand. Meta's focus will be to bring the metaverse to life and help people connect, find communities and grow businesses."

Is this merely a rebranding of Facebook after the considerable hit its image has taken with the revelations of the whistle-blower Frances Haugen and earlier Sophie Zhang? Is it to move away from its sullied past and present to an alternate universe, the metaverse that Facebook will create? So that we forget about its hate-filled Facebook pages that fuel its ad-driven business empire? So that it may win back the young viewers that have voted against Facebook with their keyboards and joysticks?

Facebook's internal documents reflect this desperation to win back the young users, even talking about focussing on preteens, 9 to 12-year-olds, as "a valuable and an untapped audience". More importantly, it has the same logic as the cigarette companies targeting children. Once you hook them, they stay hooked for life, providing the companies captive customers for life. Or in the case of Facebook, selling those hooked onto Facebook to the advertisers for their lifetime.

The general reaction to Facebook's Meta – or its metamorphosis to metaverse – has ranged from cold to bewilder. For most users of Facebook, their knowledge of science fiction is meagre. So the universe as a metaverse that seamlessly transitions from the real world to the virtual is quite an alien concept. This is in spite of meeting during the pandemic on various platforms as boxed, talking heads. Those with a serious bent of mind and knowledge of literature, who find Facebook's existing world already a dystopian one, are more likely to connect Meta to Kafka's Metamorphosis. In this dystopian novel, the protagonist wakes up one morning as a humanized cockroach; or his avatar changes to a cockroach in his metaverse! This and other hilarious memes have laughed at Zuckerberg's Meta, in which the major point of his metaverse appears to be creating "cool" virtual spaces where we can meet with our friends or colleagues wearing augmented reality or virtual reality devices.

Before we write off Facebook's Meta, we need to also remember that it comes with a tonne of cash that Facebook has accumulated and its market capitalisation of nearly a trillion dollars. As a company, it is still a 1000 pound gorilla in the metaverse of Wall Street! And Facebook

alone has a user base of nearly 3 billion, with billions of users on WhatsApp and Instagram. How many of them are unique users is a different question, but any company that owns the eyeballs of half the world's population and has a mountain of cash cannot be written off.

There are two questions for Facebook, and yes, I am going to call it Facebook for now and not Meta. One is what is the metaverse that it is planning to build? And does it have a business model? In other words, will it get the young audience it has lost and can they sell either virtual "properties" or "commodities" in the metaverse for real money?

Let us look at the concept of metaverse itself. As Zuckerberg himself explains, the difference between playing video games on your keyboard or gaming console is the immersive experi-

ence. With devices that you can wear, including special glasses, haptic gloves or suits, you can see or touch objects in the virtual world and get the feeling of being in the real world. In other words, you can give your imagination a rest and let all these wearable devices – augmented reality (AR) or virtual reality (VR) devices – do the work for you. And yes, there have been enough books and films made on such futures. Those interested can go to Isaac Asimov's Robot series, which, though focussed on

Second Life, set up in 2003, had many of the goals of Meta. It is still popular among a small set of users, numbering about a million. It is an immersive universe, promotes interaction among its user avatars, can have a number of worlds with their different rules and subcultures. It even has a currency, called the Linden Dollar, that can be used within this universe, but not outside. It is still debating its fundamental purpose: is it an im-



mersive platform or a gaming world? Both possibilities exist in Facebook's Meta. An obvious driver of Meta as an immersive platform is the possibility of working from home. All tech companies are discovering that working from home is attractive to the workers but lose the creativity and control that an office space provides where employees meet and talk about their work. Zuckerberg's Meta could sell office property that allows people to "come into work" but in a virtual

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robots, take the metaverse of virtual/augmented reality for granted. The more recent iteration on this, and from where the metaverse as a virtual reality expansion of the internet occurs, is Neal Stephenson's 1992 science fiction novel Snow Crash.

There are two possibilities of the metaverse: one is to see it as a version of the real world where we can meet, go or play in the real

space rented or bought by the company as an office in Meta. This will force people to be in the "same space" as others and yet provide them with the luxury of avoiding a long commute or locating where the company offices are. Zuckerberg could sell or even rent space in his Meta and make a business model out of it. Or we could rent such spaces, choosing where the space is as virtual lounges

to meet our friends the same way we rent Zoom rooms. The other business model for Zuckerberg is to have properties, gadgets, tokens, and a host of props be sold for Meta cash which would work in the various versions of the universe and have a value outside in dollars (or Facebook's money, Libra). Unlike the Linden Dollar, which can be used only in Second Life.

The gaming world is more difficult for Zuckerberg. The gaming industry has been decades in the making and has taken off during the pandemic in the same way that online platforms like Zoom and OTT platforms like Netflix have. There are more than 3 billion gamers in the world, and they spend a huge amount of time on their gaming consoles. It is the gamers that have driven high-end PCs and laptops, which have then gone into other work that needs high-end graphics, including video editing. It has driven Nvidia's GPUs and a range of Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications. For the gamers, Zuckerberg and Facebook are again not cool. They are unlikely to be attracted to Zuckerberg's version of metaverse either.

Of course, with his bags of cash, it is possible to attract companies who make games. If Meta can attract a set of well-known gaming companies to its platform, will that power his version of metaverse? Will such gaming companies give up their independence to Facebook? That is not an easy question, as, after all, cash has its allure: of cash!

The short-term goal of Facebook was to get away from this sleazy company promoting hate and fake news on its platform. But it is also focussing on the new era of connectivity, and AI tools that we are entering that can power game-like alternate universes intersecting with the real one. But here is the Achilles heel of the US companies: the US is far behind China, South Korea in the 5G race and much poorer in its broadband penetration from many European countries. Can the US overcome this deficit with State spending on its digital infrastructure?

Can Facebook also overcome its image as a toxic social media company and build a new life for itself in Meta? It can still wield a lot of power and influence, but with its ageing user base, it may slowly dwindle in importance. Society will punish it for its selling hate and fake news, but of course, after it has done enormous damage to our social fabric. The only danger is that virtual reality can be a toxic space, as we know from the misogyny in a significant section of the gaming community. Will Facebook, with its history, add to that and build a dystopian multiverse as Meta? (IPA Service) Courtesy: People's Democracy

I won't be surprised if some forest land has been de-notified for the purpose. No wonder our Forest Officers are such favoured people these days. It is sad that Shillong Municipality

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## Fuel prices down Polls, not people a worry

By Insaf

Finally, excise duty on petrol and diesel has been cut down. Is it a majoritarian government's concern for the people overburdened by price rise, or rather weighing its prospects of winning upcoming Assembly elections in a number of States, the biggest being Uttar Pradesh? The set back the BJP suffered in recent by-polls indicates it's the latter and not the love for the common man. The "Diwali gift" of excise cut on petrol by Rs 5 and diesel by Rs

10 by the Centre, saw number of NDA-ruled States, including Assam, Goa, Uttarakhand, UP, Tripura announcing additional reduction. It is expected to not only bring relief to the common man but also reduce inflation, tweeted Home Minister Amit Shah. What has gone unsaid is, the party's not-so-impressive performance in the by-polls and perhaps the results being seen as a wake-up call.

The ruling BJP faced a humiliating defeat in Himachal Pradesh, where price rise and high oil prices were a major poll issue. The Congress swept all three Assembly seats and winning Mandi too, the Chief Minister's bastion. In West Bengal, it was again battered by the TMC, which won all four Assembly byelections by big margins. In Rajasthan, it failed to capitalise on Congress factional fight and couldn't win either of the two seats. In Haryana, its partner the INLD, which has expressed concern over the farmers protest won the seat. The saving grace, however, was Assam and Madhya Pradesh, where it won all five Assembly seats and also the Khandwa Lok Sabha seat. It did make inroad into TRS's Telanagana. In all, the BJP won only seven of the 29 State Assembly seats for which elections were held in 14 States and arch rival, Congress won eight, giving the beleaguered grand old party a bit of hope.

The saffron party, however, doesn't want to admit that ensuing poll prospects is a reason for the fuel cut, for they argue that if that was the case then results would have been different in BJP-ruled Assam and Madhya Pradesh. An argument, few and even within the party would find difficult to buy. While the debate shall continue both within and outside, the fuel cut should be seen as the beginning, for undoubtedly election sops shall follow as the next calculated move to retain hegemony.

**Dengue Concern**  
Rising cases of dengue has the Centre worried. In particular are nine States and UTs, to which the Union health ministry has sent teams of experts to aid public health measures for its control and management. At a review meeting under Minister Mandaviya on Monday last, it was noted that 1,16,991 dengue cases have so far been reported across the country and the number is 'significantly' higher in some States in October as compared to same period last year. These are: Haryana, Punjab, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir. The central teams from National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme, National Centre for Disease Control and Regional Offices have been instructed to 'report on status of vector control, availability of kits/medicines, early detection, availability and use of insecticides, status of anti-larval and anti-adult vector control measures, among others.' He sought better coordination between Centre and States and testing facilities be ramped up so that all cases are reported and treated effectively. Perhaps, with Covid cases showing a marginal decline, it may be worthwhile for hospitals like those in Delhi, consider using one-third of beds reserved for coronavirus patients for those suffering from vector-borne diseases, if the need arises. Clarity and clear cut instructions would do well rather than

statements.

**Goa's Mining**  
Resumption of mining activity in Goa is critical for the ruling BJP and it keeps its fingers crossed that the Supreme Court comes to its aid. With elections due in February and AAP and TMC going all out to make inroads into the smallest State, the Centre is working hard to make 'proper representation' before the apex court and 'find a way out,' as per Union Minister for

Highways Nitin Gadkari. On Tuesday last, he sought to assuage voters' concern saying that while Delhi was 'sympathetic' to the issue, its hands were tied: "This matter is sub-judice, without SC permission Goa government can't take any decision nor can the Union government clear it." Recall in February 2018, the iron ore industry came to a standstill after SC quashed 88 mining leases. The issue is a hot potato this poll, as Insaf on a recent visit noted. The economy dependent on iron ore export is hit hard, there is largescale unemployment and worse the tourism industry is in the doldrums with the pandemic. The Centre has given hope its 'expecting positive support from the Supreme Court.' If that happens, it will be a game changer.

**Scarce SC/ST Representation**  
Jharkhand can very well justify its decision to grant quota promotions to employees in government belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Not only does it meet Supreme Court's criteria, but the argument is that there's woefully inadequate representation at every level. A three-member committee of Hemant Soren government to study promotion, administrative efficiency and representation of SCs and STs in creamy layer under government's services and posts submitted its report on Wednesday last. It noted: the percentage of such employees in relation to total number holding such posts across the state is 4.45% and 10.04%, respectively—much less than the population ratio of SC and ST (12.08% and 26.20%). Thus, of the 3.01 lakh sanctioned post in 31 major departments, 57,182 posts are to be filled on promotion basis, while 2.44 lakh posts by direct appointment. It recommended: it's necessary to continue with reservation policy and 'any relaxation of existing provision or removal of any clause won't be justified or desirable and would be against interest of community at large.' What about policy's impact on overall administrative efficiency? Data would be more than welcome.

**Uttarakhand Saved Embarrassment**  
Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami can heave a sigh of relief. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit on Friday last to unveil a 12-foot statue of Adi Guru Shankaracharya at Kedarnath and laying the foundation stone of reconstruction projects worth over Rs 400 crore, thankfully passed off smoothly. This after Dhami had to go into damage control on Wednesday after his predecessor Trivendra Singh Rawat was shown black flags on Monday by priests there as they, along with others of Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamnotri dhams have been opposing the Devasthanam Board Act, which govern 51 temples associated with these. Apparently markets in Yamnotri and Gangotri too had pulled down shutters in solidarity with the protest. The CM, it is said assured the priests his government was 'completely' with them and the issue shall be resolved by month-end. Will Dhami keep his promise, is the big question. For he had, in September, given a similar assurance of dissolving the Board by October-end. The priests have given him one more chance. Will he, won't he depends on how it will impact ensuing polls. ---INFA

### Letters to the Editor

#### Pensioners' plight

Editor  
It is deeply troubling that no pressure group has ever taken up the issue of pensioners and their plight. Even the MLAs who have been elected to serve the society as "public servants," have ignored this issue. Today there are a number of cases of pensioners not getting their dues and they faced a very difficult time during the pandemic. I am aware of some government departments that have not done justice to the pensioners. There are cases of persons who have retired from service but their service book records have not been updated and hence no pension has been paid. It is sad that while an MLA is eligible to draw his pension even if he serves only for one tenure of five years, the common man has to run from pillar to post for his or her rights. This

state of affairs is pathetic and one that cannot be defined as "good" governance for the state.

Yours etc.,  
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar,  
Via email

#### Another backdoor deal?

Editor,  
Meghalaya Cabinet has finally approved the proposal to hand over the so-called 5 Star hotel under construction in the land of Shillong Municipality at Jail Road to a new company by the name of Maxim Infrastructure and Real Estate Pvt Ltd. This entire deal appears to be a sham and the process that was adopted to finalise the arrangement is nothing short of a cover up to hoodwink the people. A little scrutiny will reveal that the new company is nothing but old wine in a new bottle. The connection between HM Cements the

old lease and Maxim Infrastructure and Real Estate Pvt Ltd can be easily established if one cares to google search it. The important question is why did the National Company Law Tribunal have to intervene in deciding a straight case of a private party defaulting in an agreement and taking the State Government for a ride.

This was a project on a PPP node and the party had defaulted on many counts. It was for the State Government to prosecute the company, recover the losses and retrieve the project as per the agreement executed earlier. Nothing of the sort happened and instead the same party is being favoured but in a new name. Every citizen of the State wants the project to be completed and the new hotel to start functioning. But nobody wants the same to happen through nefarious means and backdoor routes. This can only happen if there are monetary deals on the

sidelines. Where was the so-called transparent process followed to finalise the new company? Was there any open tender? I for one have not seen any tender being floated in any newspaper. How were the outstanding dues of the old company fixed at Rs 2.5 crores? The old company has been in possession of the land for over 10 years. One needs to calculate the annual lease rent with the number of years the party has been in possession of the land and the penalty thereon to determine the outstanding dues. There must also be a share of revenue to be paid to Shillong Municipality.

The amount determined as outstanding appears to be grossly underestimated. Over and above that, why is the new company made to pay the penalty for the fault of the first party and why in God's name is the new company agreeing to pay the same for no fault of

theirs? This clearly reveals that the original company has come back but in a new suit. As citizens, we were given to understand that this project was taken up since Shillong Municipality did not have resources to reconstruct its own office and a PPP approach would ensure an office space for the municipality apart from a share of the revenue earned from the project. Nothing of that sort happened and today Shillong Municipality is being kicked out of its own land and the entire property will be converted in the name of a private company. As a token gesture, a small office will be constructed in some corner by the private firm with patronage of the State Government.

I won't be surprised if some forest land has been de-notified for the purpose. No wonder our Forest Officers are such favoured people these days. It is sad that Shillong Municipality

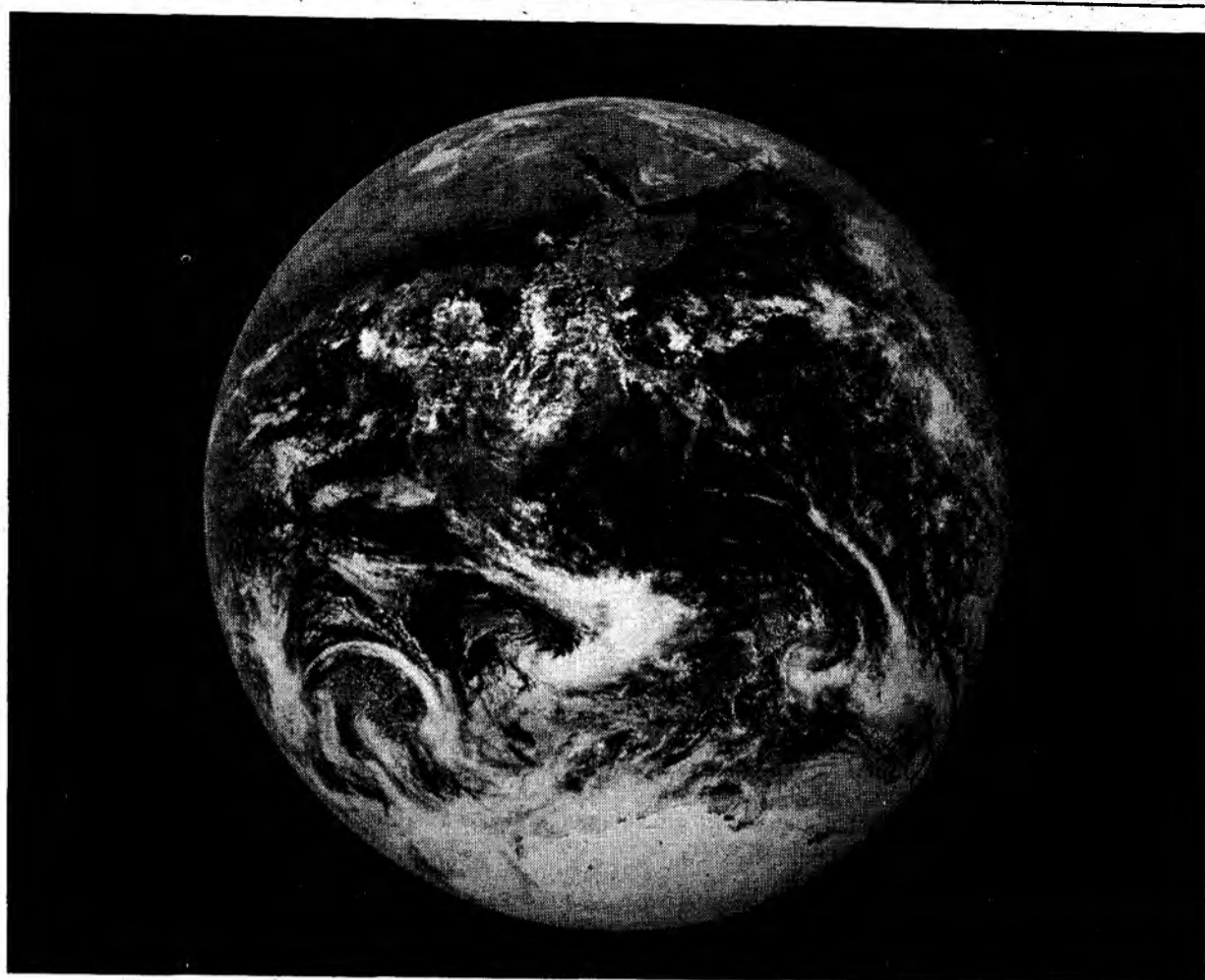
which should have been a premiere civic body playing a pivotal role in development of Shillong, is systematically being starved and destroyed by successive governments. While everybody demands for civic services and cleanliness in the city, nobody really bothers to enquire why elections are not held; why the staff does not get their salary for months; why the assets are sold off without any benefit to the municipality. Sad to say but this is the state of affairs in Meghalaya today.

People are taken for granted or as fools not to question but to do and die. A day will certainly come when answers will have to be given.

Yours etc.,  
L Surong,  
Shillong-3

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

# Time for a new "Blue Marble"



(Above) This image of the Earth from a distance, known as the Blue Marble, was taken by Apollo 17 astronauts. (Left) This photo of Earth, seen rising over the Lunar horizon, was taken by the Apollo 8 crew on Christmas Eve 1968. (Photo credits: NASA)

“Everybody in the world needs to do this. Everybody in the world needs to see this.” These were the first words of 90-year-old William Shatner as he emerged, shaking with emotion, from a brief ride into space – where the former Star Trek actor had spent barely four minutes – aboard a Blue Origin rocket on October 13 2021.

“This air that is keeping us alive,” he said. As space travellers like Shatner have witnessed, our planet’s atmosphere seems as thin as the skin of an apple relative to the Earth. Although from our perspective it might appear limitless, we can alter its composition with emissions as easily as we can pollute vast lakes and oceans.

Yet many news reports covering Shatner’s journey neglected to mention his comments on the fragility of the Earth’s atmosphere: comments that could easily have been intended for delegates that attended the UN climate change conference COP26 in Glasgow.

Shatner’s voyage was made possible by Jeff Bezos’ space exploration company Blue Origin, founded in 2000, and has understandably been subject to criticism. Bezos, the billionaire founder of e-commerce giant Amazon, arguably achieved his astronomical success by hollowing out the cultural and commercial infrastructure of local areas across the globe: and has been condemned for spending billions expanding into the space tourism industry rather than improving the environment down on

Earth. The manned space programme of the 1960s and 1970s, run competitively by the US and Russia, was also criticised as a waste of money. But it yielded one huge and unexpected bonus: the first view of Earth from space, in all its majestic isolation.

At Christmas 1968, the crew of Apollo 8 became the first people to see and photograph the whole planet as they flew around the moon. From a quarter of a million miles away, the Earth’s unique beauty and vulnerability became apparent like never before.

During the voyage, astronaut Bill Anders took an unscheduled photo of the Earth partly in shadow, with the moon in the foreground. The moon’s bone-dead colours contrasted directly with the vibrantly-coloured, fertile Earth.

The photo, known colloquially as “Earthrise”, was later described by photographer Galen Rowell as “the most influential environmental photograph ever taken”. Years later, Anders reflected on his experience: “We came all this way to the moon, and yet the most significant thing we’re seeing is our own home planet.”

#### AN INSPIRATION

No sooner did the Earth become wholly visible than it sparked the rapid growth of the environmental movement, marked by the formation of the environmental charity Friends of the Earth in 1969 and

the first UN Earth Summit in Stockholm in 1972. Commentator John Caffrey wrote in 1970 that “the greatest lasting benefit of the Apollo missions may be this sudden rush of inspiration to try to save this fragile environment – if we still can.”

In December 1972, the final Apollo mission (Apollo 17) captured possibly an even more famous image of the Earth, lit by the Sun at a distance of 28,000 miles: known as the “Blue Marble” photo.

Unlike Earthrise’s depiction of a half-shaded planet taken from the north, this photo showed the whole Earth from the south, including the first view of Antarctica. This view of a watery globe, centred on Madagascar rather than on a Western country, appeared as a photographic manifesto for global equality. With a human eye behind the lens, humankind found itself face to face with Mother Earth in an image that has become one of the most reproduced pictures of all time.

Actually travelling to space to see this transformative sight in person is, of course, impossible for the vast majority of the population. Since 1972, no human has left Earth’s orbit or seen the whole Earth, and very few ever will.

As a result, groups such as the Overview Institute and the Center for Planetary Identity have since come up with imaginative schemes to spread the environmental consciousness created by viewing the Earth from a distance to the wider population, including the use of virtual reality. As a historian

and an environmentalist, I have a more modest proposal.

#### A NEW BLUE MARBLE

Next year, 50 years will have passed since the Blue Marble photo: I think it’s time to take another. In December 2022, the Earth will be in a similar position relative to the sun as it was in December 1972. This will give a probe the opportunity to capture a photo of the full Earth from the same distance and angle as before, revisiting perhaps the most environmentally valuable achievement of the space age.

Although impressive images have since been captured of the whole planet by satellites, none offer the same perspective as the original image and most are composites, patched together from multiple frames to show an idealised globe in perfect weather.

Although this image will still be beautiful, the planet it captures won’t be the same. Deserts like the Sahara will have expanded. Cloud systems will have altered. Antarctic ice will have retreated, and less green will be visible. Seen side by side, these two Blue Marbles, taken half a century apart, would bring home the consequences of climate change wordlessly, instantly and globally.

So, space billionaires: if you truly care about protecting our planet, let’s have the ultimate Earth-shot. (*The Conversation*)

## November 7 and why it is important

Cancer is a disease in which some cells of the body grow uncontrollably and has the tendency to spread to other part of the body. The word cancer itself is enough to make someone faint or collapse when they know that they are having it in their body. In the whole journey of treating a cancer patient one of the most difficult job of a treating doctor is to break the news to the patient that they are diagnosed with a cancer. Some patient used to just run away from the OPD chamber immediately after hearing that they are having cancer.

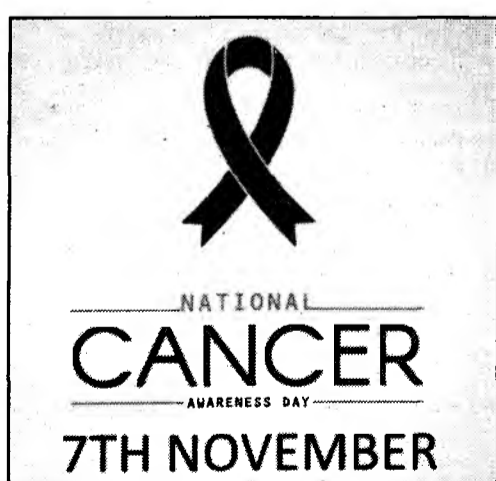
If this word CANCER is such a horrifying and unwanted word let us take the opportunity of today’s National Cancer Awareness Day the 7th November 2021 to have some insight about this horrifying disease.

National Cancer Awareness Day is observed on 7th November every year in India. Union Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan first announced National Cancer Awareness Day in September 2014. If we look at the statistics of cancer in India almost 1.3 million people were detected with cancer as on 2020. The five leading sites of cancer in India are breast, lung, mouth, cervix uteri, and tongue. Majority of these cancers were detected at a very advanced stage which make treatment of cancer difficult. The reasons behind this are most people are still not aware about the early sign and symptoms of cancer and those who are detected with cancer are hesitated to undergo treatment due to fear of the cancer related treatment and psychological effect. For this reason National Cancer Awareness day was launched and the main objective of commemorating this day is to spread awareness about cancer through various ways and means so that people will have knowledge about it and subsequently will help in PREVENTION and EARLY DETECTION of cancer. Hence PREVENTION and EARLY DETECTION is the main objective of this day.

Why PREVENTION? Though

### National Cancer Awareness Day

genetic profile of a patient plays an important role in causing cancer but we should know that some of the cancers are preventable. Cancers of the head and neck part, cancer of mouth, tongue, larynx (voice box), oesophagus (food



pipe), are preventable to major extent. Tobacco consumption, be it in chewing or smoking form, is the main cause of cancer in the above mentioned region of head and neck. Not only in these part but tobacco is a major risk factor in causing cancer in other parts of the body like bladder, kidney, liver, stomach, pancreas, colon and rectum, and cervix. Tobacco product contains more than 250 chemicals that are harmful to the body and among these about 70 of them are known to have the potential to cause cancer. Not only cancer, tobacco can cause many other diseases in the body. Hence quitting tobacco can prevent from many cancers and other disease.

Why EARLY DETECTION? Though cancer is considered to be incurable but most of the cancers can be treated successfully if they

are detected at an early stage. This vague “incurable” nature of cancer is over exaggerated and the reason that most cancer patients could not achieved a curable treatment is because they are diagnosed at a late stage. As we know cancer can spread to other parts of the body and it does so at a late stage. This spreading of cancer to other parts of the body made it impossible to achieve a curable treatment.

In Meghalaya the most prevalent form of cancer are cancer of Oesophagus (food pipe), Larynx (voice box), Mouth and Tongue. Cancer of lung, breast and cervix are also quite common. As mentioned above most of these prevalent cancers are preventable by quitting tobacco and are curable if they are treated at an early stage.

So how can these cancers be detected at an early stage? Some of the early signs of these cancers are: difficulty swallowing solid food, hoarseness of voice more than 3 weeks, any abnormal growth in mouth or tongue or any ulcer that does not heal in 3 weeks, swelling in the neck, coughing with blood passing of blood in stool. These are the sign that can easily be seen by our naked eyes without any other investigation so if we encounter any of these sign we should always consult a doctor for evaluation and if possible consulting a doctor with cancer specialist is highly recommended. It is important to mention that not all people having these signs above are having cancer but it is always good to consult a doctor rather than ignoring it.

The major hurdle in treating

cancer is the fear of the people for operation or the side effect of radiation and chemotherapy. Due to this fear people tends to seek other ways and means of treatment and in this process the cancer keeps on increasing and spreading in their body and by the time they reach a cancer specialist it is already in advanced stage and hence incurable. Most of these patients who delayed their treatment are those who are consuming herbal medicine for months and months. Till the present date the only recommended treatment for cancer is either operation or radiation or chemotherapy or combination of any of these. Many studies had shown that Herbal medicine has no cure for cancer but they can be used as supplements but not as the primary treatment for cancer. So let this national cancer awareness day bring some information to all that those who are diagnosed with cancer they should always first consult a cancer specialist doctor rather than wasting their time attending quacks or herbal medicine.

And for those who undergone treatment for cancer we know it’s painful to deal with the side effect of surgery or radiation or chemotherapy but we should know that these side effects are for short term. Never hesitate to approach a doctor for treatment or never get diverted by others opinion regarding other inadvisable treatment. It’s your own body and always fight the cancer with your strong will. The famous author Viktor E. Frankl once quoted in his famous book Man’s Search For Meaning: “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” So even your part of the body is taken away by the cancer but always put your will and attitude in the right direction when choosing to treat cancer.

(By Dr Chanmiki Sayoo, MS ENT, Head and Neck Cancer Specialist)

## Lighting up elderly lives

As the country slowly steps towards some form of normalcy amidst the pandemic, this Diwali, non-governmental organization HelpAge India working for disadvantaged elders, celebrates the festival of lights with a message of hope and togetherness through its campaign and film, ‘Andhero Se Roshini Tak’.

In a marathon celebration, HelpAge marks the festival across 100 old age homes across the country, bringing happiness, hope and joy to senior citizens, many of who were suffering from isolation, loneliness and a sense of abandonment during the pandemic. The campaign aims to bring them back into the fold and give them a ray of hope and support them.

The campaign highlights the impact of the pandemic on India’s elders vis a vis their health, livelihood and the pervading sense of loneliness and feeling of being forgotten by their own, as social distancing, led to social isolation for many of our elders who were left to fend for themselves. According to a survey done by HelpAge earlier this year, 36 percent elders at home in India ‘were just waiting for the phone to ring’. During the first lockdown, 65 percent of elders lost their only source of livelihood, leaving them with no resources for medicines and no one to reach out to.

The core campaign message urges the younger generation and society at large, to bring hope, light and ‘Roshini’ back into the

lives of elders. It encourages bringing elders back into the family fold and pushes for elder inclusion. A time to give back and spread the love, and reach out to those elders who have no one to call their own and support them.

“Diwali is a time synonymous with hope, positivity and togetherness. The pandemic took a heavy toll on the lives of our elderly, particularly on the disadvantaged. Identified as the most



vulnerable, many faced challenges at multiple levels, from loss of livelihood to having no money, no support and were left with a deep sense of isolation and constant anxiety. For those living alone, it was even worse. We hope through this campaign #AndheroSeRoshiniTak we can sensitize people to urgently come forward and celebrate this festival in its truest sense, by sharing the light and love with those who need it most. It is our responsibility to bring light into their lives, it’s time to give back.” said Rohit Prasad, Chief Executive Officer, HelpAge India. (*IANSLife*)

# Ornithologist Salim Ali's forgotten radio-casts now come 'alive' in book

By Quaid Najmi

In a unique initiative, the forgotten radio broadcasts of legendary ornithologist, the late Dr. Salim Ali have been compiled and brought 'alive' in a book form, which will be released on November 12, marking the 125th birth anniversary of the 'Birdman of India'.

Dr. Salim Moizuddin A. Ali (November 12, 1896-June 20, 1987) was the first Indian to conduct systematic bird surveys across undivided India and even later, and then penned several bird books which popularised ornithology in the sub-continent.

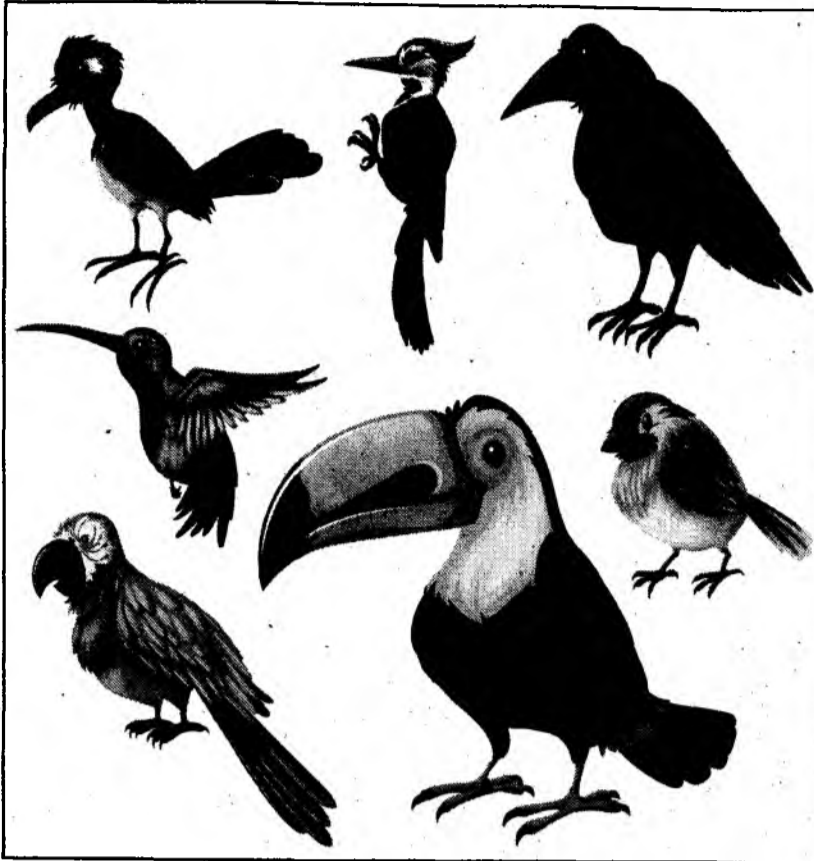
The book — "Words For Birds" — edited by renowned author Tara Gandhi, comprises all the 35 broadcasts of Dr. Ali on All India Radio (AIR) — from British India to Independent 1980s — probably unheard of by most people in the current century.

"I had worked with Dr. Salim Ali for long... I have even worked on his other papers and documents and I came across these broadcasts that are well-preserved by BNHS," the book editor Gandhi told IANS briefly, as the book awaits official release.

It will be unveiled as part of the ongoing 125th birth anniversary celebrations of the great ornithologist conferred with the Padma Vibhushan (1976), at the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS, founded 1883), said Education Officer Raju Kasambe.

The 35 talks that comprise "Words For Birds" were broadcast over 45 years, between 1941-1985, revealing Dr. Ali's exceptional skills both as an oral communicator and a passionate bird propagandist.

"The object of these talks is really to interest listeners, in the first instance for the healthy pleasure and satisfaction bird watching affords rather than for its intrinsic scientific possibilities," the ornithologist had said



of his radio transmissions.

The enthralling radio-casts, in a story-telling style, cover a wide range — bird habits and habitats, risks they face, the crucial role of avian in nature's cyclic processes, how they benefit agriculture, unseen or little understood contributions to the economy, etc.

On his passion, Dr. Ali said how 50 years ago bird watching in India was nowhere as popular, or indeed respectable, as it has become now, and in his younger days he would time and again fall in with persons who left him with a feeling, as they withdrew, that they were inwardly tapping a pitying finger on their foreheads.

"Their first glimpse of me very often was, it is true, of a distinctly shabby khaki-clad individual

of the garage mechanic type, wandering leisurely and rather aimlessly about the countryside and surreptitiously peeping into bushes, and holes in tree-trunks and earth banks..." said the legend modestly.

Though he had focussed mainly on birds in his radio talks, it is evident that he was interested in all forms of wildlife and contemporary conservation issues, too, with each talk reading like a short essay, and the reader can even glance randomly through it to be immensely educated and entertained.

Dr. Ali's best-sellers from his massive collection include "Book Of Indian Birds" and the monumental 10-volume "Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan" (co-authored with S. Dillon Ripley), "The Birds of Kutch",



"Indian Hill Birds", "Birds of Kerala", "The Birds of Sikkim", and his autobiography, "The Fall of a Sparrow".

The book editor Gandhi was guided by Dr. Ali for MSc. (Field Ornithology), and she works for biodiversity conservation, conducts surveys to document birds and other wildlife in India.

Besides scientific and popular articles on nature and ecology, she has penned several books like "Birds, Wild Animals and Agriculture: Conflict and Coexistence in India" and edited the two-volume "A Bird's Eye View: The Collected Essays and Shorter Writings of Salim Ali".

Published by Black Kite and Hachette, "Words For Birds" (256 pg/Rs.599) will soon be available from BNHS and Amazon platforms.

# Using art to understand Episteme

An exhibition, Episteme curated by Monica Jain, features work by 10 emerging Indian artists including Pinaki Ranjan Mohanty, Kundan Mondal, Amjum Rizve, Manish Sharma, Mainaz Bano, Tapas Biswas, Sohām Raha, Sangam Vankhade, Pratik Raut, and Vijaya Chauhan exploring socio-political history through a contemporary lens via the senses at Art Centrix Space.

This is their first physical exhibition of the season; Episteme addresses relationships with respective geographical areas along with their social, political and environmental history. The artists in the show look back at objects and events within a particular historical context through a contemporary lens.

Drawing from the idea that the senses help to interpret information and truly understand concepts (or Episteme). This information varies from person to person and we can see this through each artists' interpretation of their environment through their individual works. These layered narratives question topics including ecological problems, man-made capitalist problems, colonialism, power relations, indigenous cultural practices, and new forms of communication like

Braille. Monica Jain, the curator-director of Art Centrix Space has always believed that work must be supported by specialised training. This show presents works by artists who have been educated from some of the best art universities located in the country, each with its own traditions.

Talking about the exhibition Monica notes "Art Centrix Space's vision is to work towards the development of South Asian artistic practices through exchanges, programs and curatorial interventions, to generate larger associations and viewership of Indian contemporary art. I'm delighted to present our first exhibition in a while - Episteme!"

Episteme offers viewers the first opportunity to see the Art Centrix Space's expanded space that displays site-specific installations -- the beautifully landscaped two acres precinct in South Delhi houses the main gallery space and sculpture garden. The extended and renovated space is intended to provide a stimulus to artistic and curatorial practices in Delhi. Developed as a hub for South Asian contemporary art, it will enable the gallery to build on its existing programming acting as both a gallery and a space for cultural exchange. (IANS/ife)



## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, NOV 7, 2021

Mercury is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Rahu on your solar return chart and it will give fantastic results. Your financial position will be good. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will do some work that will bring you criticism, but there is no need to get anxious. Your name and fame will rise. New job offer will keep coming. Your business too will expand and grow. You will make good profits. Your romantic life will be wonderful. Your marriage could get fixed to a person of your liking. You will show interest in welfare and charitable work. You will also find a solution to all the problems because of your self confidence. Be cautious while investing your money. In job you will make progress. Auspicious functions will keep taking place in your home. You could meet an influential person who will help you a lot when you need it most.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It is going to be a successful week on the whole. Your liberal and flexible attitude will help you maintain your dominance in your work field. Work done by you will be fully successful and will win you lot of praise from others. You will be on the move and meet a lot of people. There can be meetings, travels and contracts with regard to work. You will get beneficial results later on. You will also interfere in affairs of other people as you do not want any unnecessary criticism. You will also enjoy wonderful bonding with your partner/spouse. You will also pay attention to your household affairs. You will be busy in shopping and buying news items for your home. You will be busy in making preparations for festivals at your home. Students will get success in interview/exams.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You will be caught in flurry of activities this week. Some of your work might get stalled due to your overconfidence. And it will be worthwhile to postpone some of them for now. You will pay attention to your work/business. Financial gains are indicated. Your bosses and colleagues will help you a lot. You will be advised to use your money at the right place. You will also clear some of your outstanding dues. You will enjoy excellent relations with your spouse. Love birds will spend lot of time together and will understand each other's feelings very well. Overall you will be happy. But you need to be somewhat cautious too in personal matters. There will be an unknown fear in your mind which you need to get over. There is absolutely nothing to worry.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

A new project will catch your attention and you will devote your full time to it. You will also get an opportunity to make progress in your job. You will be hungry for success. There are chances of success in interviews. You will also have wonderful times with your family and friends. You will go as a guest and enjoy yourself. Students will acquire new knowledge and skills. They will be happy at getting admission in the institutes of their choice. It is time to relax and enjoy yourself. You will be busy in studying, research, games, meditation and prayers. Some new person will come in your life and you will welcome this positive change. You will also extend a hand of friendship to poor, old and needy ones. Working women will get full support. The placement of planets will bring peace and calm.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

It is going to be a week which will bring changes in your personality and attitude. You will get new job/business offers. Your time will be spent in business activities and professional engagements. You will have monetary gains. All your plans will move in the direction of fructification. Your pending work will gather speed. Your life will gather speed. Your life will once again be back on track. You will also perform noble deeds. There will be an increase in your prestige and name. You will also come closer to your mate. The atmosphere at home will be peaceful. Auspicious functions will also take place at your home. Romance with partner will deepen. In money related matters you will move forward with intelligence and cleverness. You will be full of enthusiasm and energy. You will make plans for the future. There will be praise from all quarters.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

The beginning of the week will be terrific. There will be an increase in your work efficiency. You will be caught in a controversy but will come out of it with ease. Your name and fame will rise. You will have monetary gains. Those who are in job could get promotion. You can also plan to enter into a joint venture or partnership in business. An unknown person will help you a lot. Your family and friends will support you. You will be unable to understand how your problems are getting solved with ease. But you need to take care of your health and extra expenses. You will get a hold on your financial condition. You will also plan to go out on a trip with your partner and enjoy peace and bliss amidst natural surroundings. Some incident will happen that will give solace to your mind.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23)

Your time will be spent in useful activities. You will be able to do even impossible tasks. You will remain in the spot light and will enjoy all the attention that you get. You will also impress people with your attitude and will also be able to get your work done. The placement of Jupiter will take you towards success in life. You will make progress in your job/business. Your health will remain perfect. And you will remain under control of things most of the time. You will face the struggles of life with a lot of confidence and money will keep coming. Your partner will be very happy and support

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

It is a great period for mental peace and bliss. You will remain grounded and realistic. You will not let your ego come in between your career and personal gains. You will keep things to yourself and not talk about your plans with anyone. But this will pay you in the long run very well. You will enjoy good health. Your achievements in the financial field will be great. You will also make plans of going out somewhere with your family. You will get to learn a lot from your experience. You will move forward too. New job/business offers will keep coming. With your liberal and positive attitude you will be successful in winning over your friends. A dispute in the neighborhood will get resolved. Those who are in politics, media and social work will shine. Some pleasant news will be received from a relative. You will meet a famous personality too.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

It is going to be a wonderful week from all perspective. You will get success in whatever you do. You could be promoted all of a sudden in your job. You will have monetary gains. Your boss will also be in your favor. And colleagues will obey your orders. You will also plan to start a new business. You will also invest your money in currency, shares and gold. It will be wise not to trust unknown persons. Your job prospects will also improve. You will also explore options to increase your income and profits. The passage of time is in your favor. Working women will get full support. They will be able to establish a balance between house and office. You will also support your partner. He/she will be faithful and loyal to you. You will also make a lot of contacts in social circle. You will be strategically clear and intelligent. You will also spend with open hands. Preparation for some auspicious function will also be made.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

This is going to be a normal week. You will feel new energy inside you. Your talent will get reflected. And your hard work will be duly rewarded. You will also move in the right direction. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will take aid and advice of others. You will have monetary gains. If you work quietly and patiently with prudence and wisdom, you will achieve the best. Your skills will also be appreciated by all as your decision in the right direction may make people to appreciate you. You will also enjoy a fascinating journey in your love life. Love mates will come closer and enjoy wonderful bonding and will trust each other. You will be ready to make all sacrifices to make your partner happy. You will enjoy a blissful married life. You will complete your work very fastly, ending all the hurdles on your way automatically.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

It is time to take stock of the things and review your priorities. The tide wont be favorable to begin with. Your income will be good but your skyrocketing expenses may put you in a financial crunch, forcing you to even incur a loan. Hence, you need to be careful. Due to your poor health you may postpone your social commitments. But by the middle of the week you will be in command of the situation. Your work will start to get completed and you will feel a lot more relaxed and confident. You will get success in love matters. Husband and wife will enjoy better understanding. You will also enjoy your work and atmosphere will be peaceful. Your peers and bosses will support you. You will get over all your problems intelligently. Guests may come and you will treat them quite lavishly. You may get an exhilarating news from your progeny.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

There will be gains from all directions. You will pay attention to work plans and achieve success in work. You will also complete your work as a mission. You will discharge your responsibilities well. Your peers and bosses will support you fully. You will have sweet relationship with your spouse/partner. A new person can enter your life all of a sudden. You will look after your family very well. You will also become the favorite of your family. It is time for getting profits in business. Overall you will be well and enjoys peaceful times. You will have mental peace. You will be attracted towards spiritualism and religion. You will be receptive towards advice. You will socialize a lot and meet lot of people. Your professional commitments will also keep you engaged.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

It will be a victory day. You will work very hard and your desires will get fulfilled. You will complete your tasks. You will also become a favorite of your bosses. You will also win trust of your seniors. You will get closer to your partner. You will be able to keep personal matters a secret. You will also get some good news from somewhere and take an important decision as well regarding your career. You will balance your professional life as well as domestic life well. You will get the blessings and affection of your parents. You will be successful in defeating your opponents and winning a competitive exams/test. Business related trips will keep you busy. You will earn money in long distance journeys. You will be successful in whatever you do. Friends will give full support. You will feel satisfied.

# Career in Science for Development

By Ranjan K Baruah

Promotion of science is essential for the progress of humanity and all other living organisms on earth. One of the days which have been observed for more than two decades is observance of World Science Day for Peace and Development on 10th November and the day highlights the significant role of science in society and the need to engage the wider public in debates on emerging scientific issues. It also underlines the importance and relevance of science in our daily lives.

By linking science more closely with society, World Science Day for Peace and Development aims to ensure that citizens are kept informed of developments in science. It also underscores the role scientists play in broadening our understanding of the remarkable, fragile planet we call home and in making our societies more sustainable. The year 2021 marks 20th edition of World Science Day for Peace and Development. With climate change becoming a serious threat to the lives of billions of people and the planet, this year's celebration will highlight the importance of "Building Climate-Ready Communities".

Discussing about the day also encourages us to take up science as our career. When we talk about science as a career then the subjects which come to our mind include Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Zoology, Botany, Geology, Environmental Science, Engineering, Medical, etc. All those who are good in academics and love subjects like Mathematics and Science during school days may take up science as their future career. Many students feel that these subjects are tough but the fact is anyone may excel in Science subjects for which they need to know their capacities and basic ideas.

Any student may start their planning related to Science from



(Representative image)

secondary level or from class IX onwards. One must know that we have to be familiar and friendly with subjects like Mathematics and Science from our school days. We can choose and take admission in Science stream after Class X. There are many subjects in Science stream and they can be chosen according to our qualifications or interests.

Students may choose to study specific subjects like Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, etc after their senior secondary level. There are other options apart from these subjects like epidemiologists who examine the causes of diseases to prevent them from transmitting and recurring, including investigating the triggers of an infection for a public health agency or collecting blood samples at an outpatient care centre. These medical scientists might work in hospitals, laboratories or universities, or for pharmaceutical companies or health insurers and we have seen their demand as we have seen the recent pandemic. An epidemiologist, also known as a medical scientist, conducts infection surveillance — tracking infections, reading data, assessing where problems may reside and deciding where intervention is needed. Talbot

says epidemiologists have the opportunity to provide thoughtful, scientific analysis to help improve the care of patients and the safety of health care workers. We shall publish more about careers in science for peace and development in our forthcoming editions.

### EXAM UPDATE

**MAT:** Management Aptitude Test (MAT) is a standardised test being administered since 1988 to facilitate Business Schools (B-Schools) to screen candidates for admission to MBA and allied programmes. Govt. of India, Ministry of HRD approved MAT as a national level test in 2003. Any B-School - national or international - can consider MAT Score as an admission input based on the Score Cards issued to the candidates. Apply before 30th November for the next test to be held on 5th December.

**ACET:** Actuarial Common Entrance Test (ACET) is conducted by Institute of Actuaries of India and aspirants may apply before 10th November.

(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjana@gmail.com)

*Strength and growth come only through continuous effort and struggle.*

— Napoleon Hill

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 88 SHILLONG, MONDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2021

### Reservation for women

SIGNIFICANTLY, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi says the first thing he would do in the event of becoming Prime Minister is to implement the much awaited reservation for women. Rahul has not elaborated on it, though it is obvious that he meant reservation for women, among other places, in legislative bodies like assemblies and Parliament. This demand has been in the air for quite some time and political parties had in the past made a commitment to ensure a 33 per cent reservation for women in electoral bodies. Based on the ground that women constitute about half the population, granting them a one-third space in legislative bodies is the minimum they should expect. There however is resistance to such a move from some regional parties based on how the social scenario will pan out in such an eventuality and how the backward and depressed sections of the population would be able to protect or promote their interests in this context.

Fact is that in the past half a century, since Indira Gandhi took over the reins of India's leadership, women have progressively entered almost every sector of public life, including governmental jobs and the management of private sector entities. The banking sector, for instance, has placed them in top positions and the US multinational firm Pepsi Co has placed at its head an Indian woman executive to lead a team of 1,70,000 staff. The US has as its vice president today a woman of Indian origin. In the neighbourhood, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh boasted of women at the head of its governance system. They have demonstrated strong leadership qualities. Germany and the United Kingdom saw women governing the nation in most-admirable ways, as in the case of Margaret Thatcher, the Iron Lady, and Angela Merkel. Yet, the fact remains that social prejudices against women at the helm of affairs is evident at lower levels.

A decisive step in empowering women was taken in India when reservation was ensured for them in Panchayat Raj institutions or local bodies. Many women are at the head of these institutions and social acceptance about women in leadership levels has increased as a result. The logical next step forward is to implement the reservation system for women in assemblies and parliaments. It was Victor Hugo who said, "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come." Rahul Gandhi has only stated only the obvious. Women have come of age a long time ago but have been enslaved by patriarchy. Getting out of this social organisation requires a political push. The BJP's "beti bachao beti padhao" remains only a slogan.

# 2023 an uphill task for the Congress

By H.H. Mohrmen

The result of the recently held by-election which has been termed by many as the semifinal to the 2023 general election is finally out and the score as everybody know is, MDA 3 Congress 0. The result is definitely not music to the ears of the leaders and Congress party workers in the state. But the defeat can be a lesson for the party. The Congress debacle is both a good and bad news for the grand old party of the country. The good news is if the party leaders learn from the defeat and try to understand the causes of the defeat by analysing the three by-elections in detail. The bad news is, if in spite of the defeat the party leaders continue on their ego trip and do not learn from their mistakes. If the leaders continue to ride on their ego horses instead of addressing the issue at hand, then the party is destined for

election.

After all, Pala is already a known face in the party circles in Delhi and a leader at the national level. He is already a big fish in the Party and should leave the state to the state leaders. And if he really wants the Congress to come back to power after the 2023 election, he should sacrifice his personal ambitions to become the Chief Minister of the state and work for the party wholeheartedly. Even when media people asked him if he is going to contest the next election, he should stop responding that it is up to the Party because this gives a wrong signal to his adversaries. The reason is also because politics they say is the art of the possible, and by giving an open-ended answer, he leaves ample

space for his adversaries to doubt his sincerity. And by reiterating his stand on this issue he could win over his opponents to his side. By doing so, the President will kill two birds with one stone and the most important message from this statement is that it will invigorate the party cadres in the entire state and the second and the most important thing that will happen from this statement is that Dr Mukul Sangma will stay put and remain in the party.

**Undisputed leader of the Garo hills**  
After the famous haircut visit to Kolkata, political pundits are of the opinion that Dr Mukul Sangma's two feet are in two different places now. And to say more than that is to state the obvious. The question that needs to be asked is what will he gain and lose if he decides to move both his feet to one or the other side of the divide? After the demise of Purno A Sangma, Dr Sangma automatically became the undisputed leader of the Garo hills region and he remains so till date. The truth is Dr Sangma will be in the race for the honours only if he remains

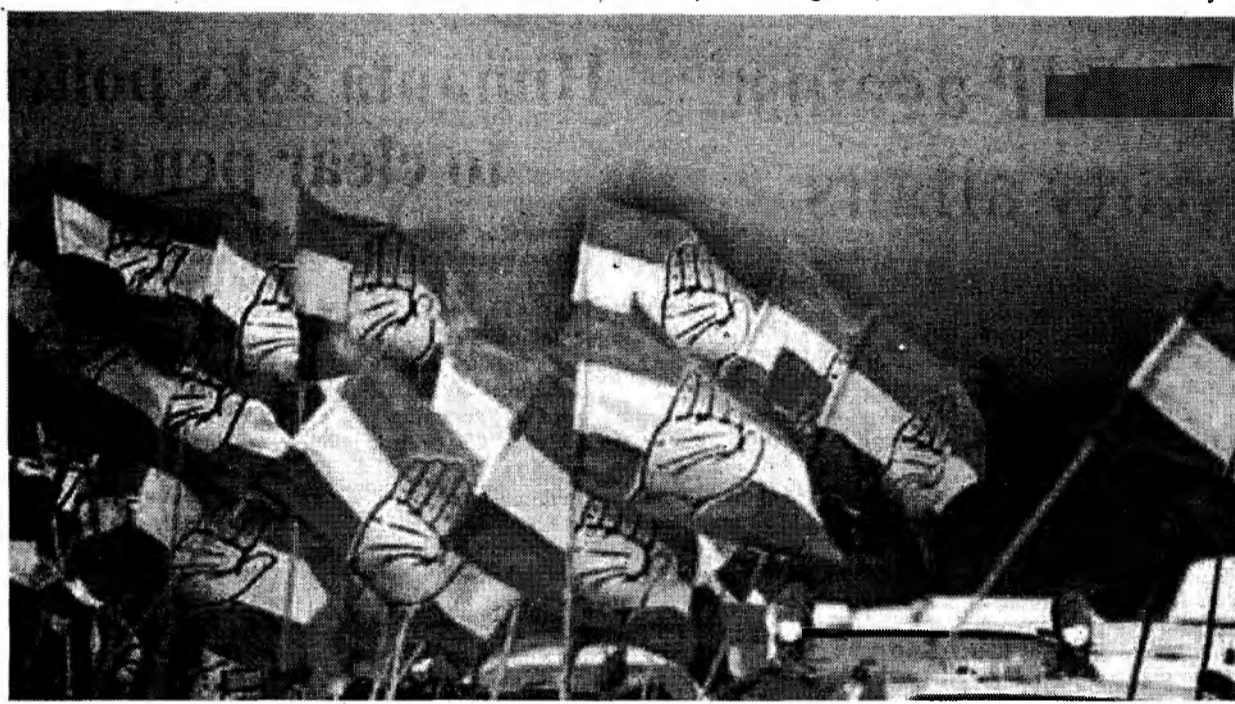
assuming that a few Congress legislators follow him, that will bring the tally of the new party to six or seven. Considering the big Bengali population in both Laban and Pynthor Umkhrah, and his party is able to snatch these seats from the BJP, then the new party might win eight to nine seats at the most. He will still be a kingmaker but not a king anymore as he will leave his dominion over the Garo hills region to his opponents. But if he remains in the Congress and the party becomes united, he retains his position and more importantly will give the NPP and its MDA partners a run for their money. The MDA partners know that they will face an uphill task in the next election if the Congress is united.

Dr Sangma has a big decision to make in the next few months and the decision will be crucial for him as a leader. It will either help him retain his stronghold over the state or make him just another player or a king maker in the eventuality of a coalition government. There is going to be a vast difference between the Dr Mukul Sangma

in a new dispensation and a Mukul Sangma in the GOP. The real shrewd leader knows what move he will take.

**Congress still a force to reckon with**

The NPP or its partners cannot just wish the Congress away. The Party still has influence in many constituencies of the state and the Congress leaders too know this very well, but the only thing needed now is to make a smart move. Enough of blame game because people know that the Congress is also using money power during the elections. It is only that the MDA partners have more money than the Congress this time around. As the saying goes, a thief knows that the other is also a thief because they have indulged in the same business. The only problem is this time the other party got lucky while the other unfortunately did not succeed. If money is



doom in the next election.

**President has to take the responsibility**

If any change is to happen it has to be from the top. As any good leader Vincent H Pala should come out and accept the defeat. That should be the first step that he makes after the debacle. In fact, that is what Pala should do immediately on his return from Glasgow. The problem with Pala is the trust deficit that he carries as baggage from his earlier dealings with those who know him and even those within his own party. Pala has to be honest and show that he really means it this time if he is to regain the trust of the public and even his party workers. Mere words will not do, he has to show to the public and the party workers that he really wants the party to succeed this time.

The first step towards achieving the goal is for Pala to declare that he has decided not to contest the next Assembly election this time around. He should categorically state that he will put all his time and energy in building the party and ensuring that it wins the 2023

election. After all, Pala is already a known face in the party circles in Delhi and a leader at the national level. He is already a big fish in the Party and should leave the state to the state leaders. And if he really wants the Congress to come back to power after the 2023 election, he should sacrifice his personal ambitions to become the Chief Minister of the state and work for the party wholeheartedly. Even when media people asked him if he is going to contest the next election, he should stop responding that it is up to the Party because this gives a wrong signal to his adversaries. The reason is also because politics they say is the art of the possible, and by giving an open-ended answer, he leaves ample

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assuming that a few Congress legislators follow him, that will bring the tally of the new party to six or seven. Considering the big Bengali population in both Laban and Pynthor Umkhrah, and his party is able to snatch these seats from the BJP, then the new party might win eight to nine seats at the most. He will still be a kingmaker but not a king anymore as he will leave his dominion over the Garo hills region to his opponents. But if he remains in the Congress and the party becomes united, he retains his position and more importantly will give the NPP and its MDA partners a run for their money. The MDA partners know that they will face an uphill task in the next election if the Congress is united.

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still going to be the criteria for winning the election, then the only alternative for Congress is to either ensure that they have more money than the MDA partner before the next election or to change the game.

The defeat this time is an opportunity for the Party, only if leaders learn from the mistakes and start working on the weaknesses and the challenges that the Party faced in the last election. Time unfortunately is not on the Congress party's side; only fourteen months is left till the next election. The Congress is the oldest national party in the state and this is its strength and opportunity. While the MDA partners are basking in their victory, the Congress should start working. Pala should stop wasting his time in trying to woo back the Party's old guards, but instead build the party bases in the entire state. Only if Pala and Dr Sangma can work together, will the Congress be a force to reckon with in the ensuing elections. Otherwise, the Congress is doomed.

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## COP26 : Pledges on paper; intent missing

By Shivaji Sarkar

The climate summit COP26 is a bunch of promises only even as desertification the world over increases. The meet is less on concrete terms to bring down temperatures but high on verbose. It's a 'failure', is how youth activist Greta Thunberg described it during the protest in Glasgow. She termed it as having turned into a "PR event to fight for the status quo," and comparing it to a "global north greenwash festival."

On the Indian front, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has struck the right note. He has taken time till 2070 so that India's development is not smothered by the reticence of the developed world. He says that the commitment to climate has a cost and the rich nations are not meeting their pledge of providing \$100 billion a year to developing nations by 2020, as agreed at the climate conference in Copenhagen in 2009. The target has simply not been met yet.

Nations such as Saudi Arabia, Japan and Australia on the other hand are asking the United Nations to play down the need to move rapidly from fossil fuels. The Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that 32000 submissions have been made by governments, companies and other interested parties to dilute the issues of fossil fuel.

They are arguing that the world does not need to reduce the use of fossil fuels as quickly as the current draft of the report recommends. A West Asian country's oil ministry has sought removal of phrases such as the need for urgent and accelerated mitigation actions at all scales. The issue of temperature reduction by 2 degrees widely talked may remain on paper as they press for slower action and cutting temperature limit reduced to 1.5 degrees.

Australia does not accept the conclusion that closing coal-fired thermal power plants is necessary, even though the COP26 objective is to end the use of coal that adds to the problem of greenhouse effect. OPEC also asks the IPCC to delete lobby activism. It would protect rent extracting business models. Saudi Arabia wants deletion of the UN conclusion that the focus of decarbonisation efforts in the energy sector needs to move rapidly to zero-carbon sources and actively phasing out fossil fuels.

Many developing countries are not comfortable with the zero emission. Argentina, Norway and OPEC also challenge the contention. Norway wants the UN scientists to allow the possibility of capture and storage (CCS) as a potential tool for reducing emissions from fossil fuels. Even India had to resort to larger coal prospecting as its power system was reportedly coming to a critical stage and it had to keep the thermal power plants running.

The draft report accepts carbon could play a role in the future but says there are uncertainties about its feasibility. The CCS emerges as a vague term for continuing with the fossil fuel.

In 2015, the Paris Agreement stressed the need for limiting temperature below 2 degree to 1.5 degree celsius before 2100. India and China's commitment has increased hopes that zero emission is possible by 2070, but that again does not remain a certainty.

Indeed, the globe is warming up faster. Climate change is affecting rainfall patterns and warmer atmosphere can lead to more rainfall in some areas and drought in many others. It is expected to increase global poverty as water in excess or shortage would play havoc with human development.

The global area of dry lands is expected to expand

as the climate warms. Various projections on emission scenarios indicate arid lands will increase by 11 to 23 per cent compared a 30 year period of 1961 to 1990. This means that dry lands could be 50 to 56 per cent of the earth's land surface, a 38 per cent rise, by 2021. The arid regions will expand over southwest of North America, north and south Africa and Australia, the Mediterranean and South America.

Now at Glasgow COP26, Australia and 123 other countries signed an agreement to end deforestation by 2030. There have been many such declarations before. Such policies have to be adopted by different countries at the domestic level. If these are not implemented due to domestic political pressure such declarations would have little impact.

India never reneges on such commitment but there are various lobbies that are on reckless constructions in the Himalayas and other sensitive zones leading to serious crisis. About 97.85 million hectares (29.7 per cent) of India's total geographical area (TGA) of 328.72 mha underwent land degradation during 2018-19. In 2003-05, 94.53 mha (28.76 per cent of the TGA) underwent land degradation. The number increased to 96.40 mha (29.32 per cent of the TGA) in 2011-13.

About 83.69 mha underwent desertification in 2018-19. This was greater than the 81.48 mha in 2003-2005 and 82.64 mha in 2011-13 that were. India witnessed an increase in desertification in 28 of 31 States and Union Territories between 2011-13 and 2018-19.

Forest covers are dwindling all across Asia and various Indian States too are amending their laws for increased "developmental activities" across. Tree felling and water erosion too is causing heavy erosion as construction activities are increasing. The Centre's commitment and the States' priorities often clash and the latter play havoc at the ground level.

A McGill paper has found that more airport constructions would have environmental problems, increase warming and other ecological problems. But since these have become symbols of fast development without adequate studies, India and many other countries construct more airports. Each adds to environmental degradation. Recently in Uttar Pradesh and the hilly States a number of airports are being constructed for "better" connectivity. Man's greed caused the Kedarnath tragedy and repeated Himalayan landslides. Unfortunately, there is more propaganda than demonstrative action.

The IPCC says that various climate models suggest that rainfall will be more intense for almost the entire world, potentially increasing the risks of soil erosion. Projections indicate that most of the world will see a 16 to 24 per cent increase in heavy precipitation intensity by 2100.

The Director of Research, Grantham Institute at Imperial College, London, Joeri Rogelj, states that pledges at climate meets are not sufficient to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement and COP26 still has an important task. For the temperature control the pledges need to turn to action. But, he says, those pledges do not match the ambitions.

The International Energy Agency is unhappy with what the governments are trying to show. The governments need to have clear and credible policy, it says. Ambitions count for little if these are not implemented successfully. Would COP remain as another paper? ---INFA

### Letters to the Editor

#### New district name: A jumbled direction

Editor,

The much-awaited carving of a new district out of West Khasi Hills District has been approved by the Cabinet on November 5, 2021 and the same was announced by the Deputy Chief Minister and it has been christened as "Eastern West Khasi Hills". The creation of this new district is welcomed by every citizen, as smaller districts lead to better administration and governance. When it comes to selection of the name, the cabinet could have done much better. "Eastern West Khasi Hills" is long and mouthful in nature and also has no sense of direction. In any indication of landmark or topography it is preferable to use the 16 cardinal points for indication. The "Eastern West Khasi Hills" make it sounds like an expectation of another new district out of West Khasi Hills (which

is not likely to happen in the next 20 years). There are many options such as "North West Khasi Hills" as it is part and parcel of West Khasi Hills or "Central Khasi Hills" as it is centrally much located or simply "Mairang" District so that we could learn to get used to giving a district name without cardinal directions.

Look at our neighbouring State, Assam, which has 33 Districts and most of them are named after their then district headquarters. If cardinal directions were used it would have run out of names. Getting it right at the very beginning is very important as it is convenient for the public to promote; use it as a launch pad and also to refer and search. I strongly appeal to the Government, legislators, Local MLAs/MDCs and the people of Mairang Block and Mawthadraishan to kindly consider and review the same as the amendment can still be made before it is passed in the Assembly and a Gazette Notification is published. Let the creation of the new district be a new

milestone and in the right direction.

Yours etc.,  
Unsam Nongsiej,  
Via email

#### Congress down but not out

Editor,

The MDA alliance might ride the wave created by their recent win in three assembly constituencies that went for the by-polls but the Congress will fight back and do better the next time around. The Congress has faced several elections and knows that after every defeat some of those who are not loyal to the party are purged out. Some of those who called themselves loyal party workers had contested the recent election either from the NPP or as Independent candidates. This raises questions about their loyalty to the Congress Party which they assert they have served for several years. On the contrary these are over-ambitious individuals who want to be in the Assem-

bly without having gauged their own strength. Some of these rebel candidates might have even lost their deposits. Hence Ampareen Lyngdoh the working president of the Meghalaya Congress and VH Pala the President are both correct when they said that the rebel candidates did not really cut into the Congress vote bank. Some people have delusions of grandeur about themselves. The election results this time has hopefully taught them that what they believe about themselves and what people think of them are two different things.

Let's also admit that the NPP and UDP are part of the present coalition and therefore have the means to buy votes. Please believe me when I say that money was spent both by all parties and even by Independent candidates but the amount mattered. And people know which party/parties have money right now. There are several methods by which opportunistic voters try to sell themselves to the contesting

candidates. And the candidates also know who the influencers in their respective constituencies are. They are youth leaders, women leaders and other self-declared leaders who try and milk the candidates with the promise of bringing so many votes. Candidates and political parties look for such influencers but actually they are all big talk. It is tough to convince people to vote for anyone. Besides now most voters prefer to do a deal directly with the candidates. That way they can get more money out and favours too. I have watched several such electioneering tactics and know how things work. I wish candidates would learn to stand up and say, "I will not pay money to any voters because I am contesting to serve the people of the constituency." But I know this is an illusion in today's politics and that is why Meghalaya is drifting further and further away from the goals of its founders - the people who led the Hill State Movement. They must be

weeping to see the direction in which this state is moving. It is not going anywhere but south.

Next year we will be observing the 50th year of Meghalaya but what we should be spending more time on is to reflect and repent. We have wasted precious time in politicking but the State has not moved forward. We have today got some of the worst representatives in the Assembly. They are there to safeguard and promote their businesses. Can we vote out such people in 2023 or is that asking too much from the good people of Meghalaya?

And as I said above the Congress must rejuvenate itself and reclaim its place in Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,  
Constantine Nongkhaw,  
Via email

Letters to the Editor must have the full name, address and contact number of the writer, even if they are sent by email. Only letters with the requisite details will be published.

"As countries grapple with modernization, people who are left behind tend to hold firmer and firmer to their view of the evil of modernity."

— Richard Holbrooke

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.89 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2021

### On regional party unity

CHIEF Executive Member, KHADC, Titosstarwell Chyne well has rightly exhorted the regional political parties that trumpeting the unity clarion call merely because elections are just 14 months away is another attempt at flattering to deceive. In other words, the unity call may appear promising now but will ultimately disappoint. Come to think of it, the regional parties have never had a sitting to reflect on the politics of the times and to honestly introspect as to what they have achieved in all these years and what are the gaping loopholes still left unattended. Regional parties have an important role to play. They give a rounded perspective of the region to the national government so that policies are nuanced towards the needs of the state and region.

At the national level, Meghalaya was represented in Lok Sabha by stalwarts like GG Swell as Independent candidates, and KR Marak of the APHLC in the 5th Lok Sabha. In the 6th Lok Sabha, HS Lyngdoh was an Independent MP while PA Sangma won from the NPP. In the 7th Lok Sabha Bajubon Kharlukhi won from the APHLC and yet again PA Sangma from the NPP. In the 8th Lok Sabha GG Swell was again an Independent MP while PA Sangma continued as NPP but was replaced by Capt Sangma after he decided to come to state politics and join the Congress. In the 9th Lok Sabha, the Shillong and Tura Lok Sabha constituencies were both represented by the Congress with PG Marbaniang and Sanford Marak respectively. Since then Meghalaya has elected national party MPs till date. GG Swell made a mark although he was an Independent candidate and was appointed Deputy Speaker. But he belonged to a different league of politicians.

Regional parties help the country balance between the national and the regional agenda. They have their own strengths and must stand to defend the rights of indigenous people against the onslaught of national parties that seek to subsume all the regional forces under them. However, this does not mean that regional parties should ignore the larger national agenda. They can and must take care of both and maintain a delicate balance. The role of regional parties is to demonstrate their specific needs to the central government and not to dance to the tune of national parties while voting in parliament. In Meghalaya, regional parties have always played a secondary role and that is mainly because of the disunity and splits especially before elections. Every attempt to unite has resulted in more parties springing up. If the regional parties are serious they can form the government without the help of national parties. But unity of purpose and political egoism has always been the stumbling blocks.

### A perfect golden jubilee gift for Meghalaya's farmers!

# A University for Animal Sciences

By KN Kumar

Most countries across the globe with similar topography and climatic conditions as Meghalaya, are known for their livestock products like milk, cheese, meat, leather, and wool. The Swiss chocolate industry entirely depends on the milk produced in their own country. Though we have not fully capitalized the tremendous potential of the animal husbandry, dairy, and fishery sectors yet, a few sector-specific investments were made by the State Government, over the last one decade to bridge the production and technology gaps. The Aquaculture Mission (2012) added about 15,000 M.T. of fish to the state's production base, the AH & Veterinary Department launched the Meghalaya Milk Mission (2018) with an investment of 215.48 crores and the Pig-gery Mission (2020), with an investment of 209 crores. The state government has also created two Directorates for Food Processing and Dairy Development in 2019, to create institutional infrastructure in the respective sectors. A lot is happening in the Livestock sector.

A bit of a background here: Every farming family in Meghalaya depends upon livestock rearing as an ancillary activity that provides them food, nutrition, and income. The livestock sector buffers agrarian distress by supplementing the farm incomes of small and marginal farmers, who constitute 97.5% of the total farmers of the State. So, any investment made to support 1.5 million people who either directly or indirectly depend upon agriculture and allied sectors would be worth every rupee that is spent. Unlike the Green Revolution, the Livestock Revolution will be a demand-driven one. Investment in this sector will lead to a structural shift in our state's primary economy, which is the need of the hour. However, despite the enormous potential of the sector, the attention paid to develop human resources in these domains has been minimal in our state. As it is, the livestock sector does not get the attention it deserves in the current agriculture-centric policy framework.

The first exclusive university for Animal Sciences came up in 1989 in Tamil Nadu. TANUVAS (Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University) revolutionised the livestock sector in Tamil Nadu, so much that in a decade's time, the state became the largest egg producer in the country. Sub-

sequently Kerala, Rajasthan and U.P. have also established their own Veterinary, Fisheries and Animal Sciences Universities. As things shape up, it appears that the demand for professional education will increase manifold in the N.E. region, and new opportunities for absorbing trained workforce will also emerge parallelly in Fisheries, Poultry, Goatery, Sheep, Dairy and Piggy sectors. To cater to the myriad needs of the livestock tending farmers, as well as student community of the region, the State Government has given an in-principle approval to establish a Meghalaya State Veterinary, Dairy and Fisheries Sciences University (MSVDFSU) recently. I learnt that the Department of AH & Veterinary has already finalized the draft Bill and the state Cabinet may make a decision sometime during this month itself. This is one of the most significant decisions of the present Government and of great symbolic importance to a state that completed 50 years of its formation.

Investment in specialized livestock education will give manifold financial returns to the state in the form of growth in the GDP, expanded livelihoods and enhanced life quality. UK universities generate Rs. 9.78 lakh crore per year and support more than 940,000 jobs. The educational multiplier is estimated to be around 2.4 which implies that a 1% increase in educational expenditure raises incomes by 2.4%.

For want of Veterinary, Dairy, and Fisheries colleges in Meghalaya, most of our students must go out of the state with state sponsorship for their education. Usually they return with a B.V.Sc. (16 seats) or B.F.Sc. (4 seats) or B.Tech (Dairy Technology) (5 seats) degrees, and most of them get to join the government positions. Currently placement in the government sector is available for them, so they do not pursue higher education i.e., M.V.Sc., or M.F.Sc., or M.Tech (Dairy Technology) or Ph.D., programmes. This trend, however, cannot and should not continue because it will amount to an opportunity loss for bright students, and they are forced to lead a life far below their potential. In addition to these sponsored candidates, there are several candidates who go to other states to pursue professional degrees on their own and at their own cost. For example, though there is

a demand for undergraduate and higher education in the Dairy Sector there is not a single Dairy Science & Technology College in the entire north-eastern region.

Likewise, in the Fisheries sector, there are only two colleges in the N.E. region (1) College of Fisheries, Lembucherra (Tripura) under the Central Agricultural University and (2) College of Fisheries, Raha (Assam) under the Assam Agricultural University. It is learnt that the number of such students who pursue fisheries education outside the north-eastern region is as high as one hundred per year. Most students go to West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Odisha, to pursue courses in Fisheries Science.

As for the Veterinary Colleges, there are only two Veterinary Colleges recognized by the Veterinary Council of India in the N.E. region viz., (1) College of Veterinary Science, Khanapara, under Assam Agricultural University, Guwahati and (2) College of Veterinary Science, Selesih, Mizoram (under the Central Agriculture University, Imphal). Together, there are 160 undergraduate seats in these two colleges. For a region like the NE with high demand for milk, fish, meat and other animal products, and extra ordinary scope for rearing livestock, the number of seats available is incredibly low.

It is necessary therefore, that we encourage our educated youth to pursue higher education so they may obtain M.V.Sc., M.F.Sc., Ph.D., degrees etc. within the state, to help them find employment in the private sector as well as the academia within and outside the state. A University will provide aspiration to the youth to evolve either as professors or entrepreneurs and creates opportunities beyond the government employment. The Cabinet has given an in-principle approval for three constituent colleges under the MSVDFSU viz., (1) The College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (2) The College of Dairy Development & Technology and (3) The College of Fishery Sciences and Technology. The university will also focus on imparting training programmes to paraveterinarians, pharmacists, AI technicians, Laboratory technicians, and Multi-service Providers, etc. Building up a cadre for secondary level professionals is as much a priority to the sector as it is, to develop a cadre of

academically qualified personnel in all the three sectors viz., Veterinary, Dairy and Fishery. So, a division for Entrepreneurship and Skill Development has also been envisaged in the proposed University.

Adequate land is available at Kyrdemkulai, Ri Bhoi district for establishing the University, along with its affiliated colleges. Since the AH & Veterinary Department has about 800 acres of land at Kyrdemkulai, there will be no need to procure any land for establishing the university and the cost will therefore be minimal. Kyrdemkulai is ideal for setting up the University because of the proximity to the North-Eastern Regional Research Complex of the ICAR at Umiam, the presence of Regional Poultry and Pig Breeding Centres, Nucleus Pig Breeding Centre, the National Research Centre for Pig at Rani, etc. The Meghalaya Milk Processing Centre at Mawiong, the Meghalaya State Fisheries Research and Training Centre Mawpun are also close by. The location is also suitable for students who come from other states and countries because, the distance from the airports at Guwahati and Umroi is small.

Also, the University could generate its own funds, as many universities have started doing of late, through fees from the students of other states and foreign countries, as well as consultancies and patenting the research innovations, etc. all of which will contribute in minimizing the operational expenses. Students from the neighbouring countries like Bhutan, Myanmar, Vietnam, Bangladesh, etc. can all benefit.

The argument to establish a specialized Animal Sciences University in our state is as much about the accumulated sentiments of five decades, as it is, about the aspirations of the intelligentsia engaged in the primary sector, the unemployed youth, the farmers, miscellaneous service providers and commercial enterprises. We must resolve to make this University come up in two years. Funds are never a constraint for a promising idea. The Chairman, NABARD has already expressed his willingness to fund the University under the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF). A bold and befitting golden jubilee gift to the people of the state, this one is!

(The writer is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' (Empowerment) Commission)

## Khasi Dorbar Shnong must move with the times

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The Khasi dorbar shnong (locality/village governance) needs to reinvent itself when it comes to participation of women as equal stakeholders in a democracy. This is an issue where many have had to cut a sorry figure when it came to explaining to other Indians (and foreigners alike) the rationale behind not allowing women to participate in the proceedings of the dorbar. That we simply go by 'traditional customs and practices' is not a sufficient argument. The defense that some villages/localities do allow limited participation of women (like attending meetings and having voting rights in the election of headmen) fails to cut any ice.

However, this column is not about charting the future of the Khasi dorbar shnong in terms of what the others think. On the contrary, the aim is to do a soul searching as a community to rectify this lacuna.

The Khasi community has changed over the decades and this change is mostly driven by the women. As such, do they not deserve a voice in the village/locality governance? The failure to bring inclusiveness will be a crying shame for the current generation of thinkers and law makers. The future will look at us with disdain.

If we look closely at the Khasi community, we will find that in almost all walks of life women are performing better than the males. Talk about the weaker gender. Which one is that? Today, it is the male! Physical strength in terms of twelve units of power (khad-ar bor) means nothing. Now, it is about who has the drive and will power to excel in life. Boys, wake up and smell the coffee. If we look at academic performance right from matriculation till higher studies, girls tend to do better. In NEHU, girls have consistently been bringing better results than the boys for years together. If you enter any government/private office (one can try the Meghalaya secretariat), the administrative sections are dominated by women. In lewduh (Shillong's traditional market), the ratio of women run outlets to the males is 5:1 (approx). In household decision-making, the Khasi woman has always been playing a major role. So, why is there discrimination at the dorbar shnong in terms of leading it and/or even participating in it? There is no rationale/logic that explains the situation.

Well, the hardcore Khasi men will never agree that women are better than them. Fine, but at least please agree that women are at par with men!

Are women fit to play a key role in the dorbar shnong? If we go by the contribution of Khasi women, this question is a no brainer. However, it is disturbing to find that in this era, women are pushed and swept aside as far as dorbar shnong affairs are concerned. The dorbar is a male bastion. In a dorbar, the women have hit a glass ceiling. They can see the potential of contributing and leading it as a head, but they cannot get past the arguments of traditional customs and practices. In some cases, the men say that the women can attend but they cannot speak. How medieval is that? Hence, it is hypocrisy to think that only the women of other communities have to deal with the problem of a glass ceiling. In truth, this problem is more pronounced in the Khasi community. To this end, the demand of Mawlai Town Dorbar and Seng Kynthei Mawlai Pyllun to give a prominent role to women is highly commendable. Now, this demand must run its course. This demand

will be more effective if the women of other localities join ranks. Yes, enforcing this change may be difficult and time consuming. But, Shillong city must lead the way. It is high time for the dorbar shnong to move with the times; after all, the times they are a-changin'.

Now, to the question of who really is a 'rangbah'? In common parlance we are made to conform that the term rangbah only refers to the males. The word 'rang' is equated to a male. In any walk of Khasi life wherein the term rangbah, takes centre-stage, there is no place for the female. But, we need to properly define the gender significance of the term. Does rangbah only refer to being a male or does it have a bigger connotation? In truth, it is possible for the term to be considered historically and beyond its gender biasness. Many a times we have heard/come across the statement 'da pyrkhat rangbah' (think maturely). It is in such a situation that the real meaning of the term starts to strike a chord. Rangbah does not refer only to a male; rather, it indicates 'a way of being or a manner of action.' Rangbah is an action verb. As such, it can be said that rangbah actually resonates with thinking capacity or far-sightedness or being matured or having reached a certain age, etc. It is in this context that it is proposed that the term is gender neutral. The extension of this argument is that we can say 'u' rangbah shynrang (male) and 'ka' rangbah kynthei (female). Similarly, we can say 'u' rangbah shnong (headman), 'ka' rangbah shnong (head-woman), 'u' tymmen shnong (elderly male) and 'ka' tymmen shnong (elderly female).

The ones who are against active participation of women have always harped upon the traditional customs and practices. Customs have their place but, it does not mean that we continue with things that are archaic and adverse to societal development. If things need to change for the better, then customs are to be tweaked (or disbanded altogether). In any case, there is no objection to the male domination. It is just a demand for a fair and just share for women with a dignified place at the dorbar. Recently, Acting Syiem of Hima Mylliem, Ainam Manik Syiem in an interview given to PCN said (while referring to the Mylliem Syiemship Act, 2007) that women cannot be given a role at the dorbar shnong. His take is that the said law does not permit for such a scope and that we cannot go against the traditional customs and practices. Well Sir, no law is ever set in stone. Even the Constitution of India is amended times over. Why not a law which is just confined to a territorial jurisdiction? In addition, it would have been better to listen to the subjects before making a damning conclusion. Here, the major voice to be considered is that of the women as they are the main stakeholders. After this exercise is done, then only can the final judgment come.

As it stands, the Khasi dorbar shnong of today is an epitome of inequality with utter disregard for freedom of speech and expression. If only we had more women legislators in the district councils and legislative assembly, then in all likelihood the laws as we see today (read Mylliem Syiemship Act, 2007) would not have been so biased against the women. What a blot on the Khasi community! Oh matrilineal pride. You exist only in name!

(Email: benjamin21in@yahoo.co.in; the writer teaches at NEHU)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Where are the new MCS officers?

Editor,  
Writing this letter has to its credit a sense of concern and urgency as a senior and informed citizen of Meghalaya. As we all know, the 2021 MCS officers were recruited by MPSC on April 29, 2021 and they took charge of their office as government officials since July 1, 2021, which was the date of advent of their training program. Surprising to note however, that I have come to learn from people in the Government that the MCS training programme is supposed to span a period of 6 months! As a tax paying citizen, I ask the Meghalaya Government whether it is even required to keep the new MCS officers on training for such a long time, when the senior MCS batches such as those from 1986, 1994, 2000 and 2010 were given training of not more than two-three months, and they are presently doing a good job at their respective places of work? Is it not a waste of time and also of the public money? Sometimes we are left flabbergasted when we ponder on the

mind of the Government and their decision-making, for it keeps us wondering whether they even retrospect on the consequences of their actions. Funny to note that many districts have plenty of ADCs but very few EACs, so the poor ADCs are practically doing EAC related work. The time is ripe to depute the new batch of MCS officers for public service immediately.

Yours etc.,  
Robert Marpna,  
Upper Shillong

#### Beware of environmental dangers

Editor,  
Our luxury comes at a price. Unless we hurt mother earth, we don't get our easy appliances and gadgets. Don't we already know that innumerable industries across the globe ceaselessly emit millions after millions of gallons of obnoxious gases every single minute? We get our swanky cars, computers, washing machines, mobile, rockets, trains - anything you name, only after irreparably polluting the atmosphere. If we look at it deeply, we are all to blame for this environ-

mental mess.

No wonder, all these years, we have danced to the tune of the "capitalists." After a couple of years, we change our mobiles; every 4-5 years we upgrade our micro-ovens and washing machines! What will be the consequence of this style of living? It is a very ominous question that confronts modern civilization. I'm afraid, we have been taught how to get our day-to-day works done quickly with gadgets, but we have never been effectively informed that this all goes to quicken the climate tipping points. We followed the ads by Ranveer Singh, Amitabh Bachchan, John Abraham, Shah Rukh Khan and we changed our vehicles, refrigerators, TVs as we change our clothes. This is the most disastrous trend catching on among the increasing number of consumers. One may or may not agree but the final impact of our blind infatuation with celebrities and the endorsed products has fallen on Mother Earth! Moreover, we have also become slaves to consumer goods. They have virtually "consumed" our human prudence. We have not only polluted our atmosphere, but we have weakened our minds and

self-control. What will happen if our youths don't get to check facebook/social media updates for two days? They get restless, they are disturbed - some to the point of suicide. Our mental calmness is just hanging in a dangerous imbalance.

Here is my question. Have the members of COP26 ever thought of changing the "MINDSET" of people? Have they left the Glasgow meeting with a vow to impose a complete restriction on selling and buying consumer goods? Have they pledged to punish those capitalists and celebrities who have misled each one of us for money? The answer is an resounding 'NO'.

Yes, I totally agree with what the Secretary-General of the United Nations - António Guterres said at the recent COP26 conference. In desperation he burst out saying, "We face a tough choice, either we stop it or it stops us and it is time to say enough - enough of brutalizing biodiversity, enough of killing ourselves with carbon, enough of treating nature like a toilet, we are digging our own graves." These words came directly from his heart. Very frankly speaking, unless we turn our backs on the theory of

"consumerism" the earth will not HEAL. We must rid ourselves of the luxury of any kind at the earliest possible. We must move from Toyota to bicycles. There is no other ways. What is the point of our royal lifestyles now if our children will suffer from the "HEAT of HELL" on Earth?

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gwali,  
Shillong

#### Modi's COP commitment a tall order

Editor,  
Going by the announcement made by PM Narendra Modi at COP26, India is committed to a net-zero goal by 2070. However, this ambition poses many challenges for India. Modi described net-zero by 2070 as one element of the "panchamrit" to deal with climate change.

In fact, achieving net-zero for a country of India's size is not at all easy. For example, Coal India is poised to become a net-zero PSU. Considering that Indian government wants Coal India to produce more coal, it is evident that it is an enormous

task. Reducing fossil-fuel based power generation and replacing it with renewable energy is very expensive and exclusionary.

India's another target is installing 500 GW of non-fossil fuel electricity generation by 2030. The target is ambitious as India will have to add about 38 GW a year. India's another target is meeting 50% energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030. It requires immediate, substantial and sustained increase in the installation rate of solar capacity. Another target is that India wants to reduce carbon emissions by one billion tonnes by 2030. It remains to be seen how the government will achieve this target.

Even though the Paris Agreement of 2015 requires the developing nations to provide \$100 billion a year to developing countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change, that promise is yet to be fulfilled.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS  
Kollam

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*"They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself."*

— Andy Warhol

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LXIV No. 90 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2021

**Water: The new challenge**

REPORTS are that a hospital in Japan used water meant for toilets as drinking water for 30 years. What happened there could, certainly, not be an isolated case at least across the Asian continent – where a milling 60 per cent of the world population live and most nations are run by democratically elected governments. The scenario could be worse in India, compared to other nations in the continent, for the reasons that life in its hugely populated urban sprawls are chaotic while the nation's systems are progressively weakening due to poor governance, massive corruption and lack of strong leadership.

What is common in the Indian situation in city after big city, is of drain water getting mixed with drinking water. Drainage systems run close to and parallel to drinking water pipelines. In the event of road-laying etc, these get broken and water gets contaminated. Such contaminated water reaches our homes and hotels. Only a minor segment of the people, families and hotels have their own purification system before this water is used for drinking and household purposes. Municipalities that oversee the drainage system and the authorities that take care of the water pipelines often do not show the seriousness to check such grim situations. When stench emanates from tap water or the water colour changes, the affected people make a hue and cry and remedial action is often taken. Drains in cities like Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata, for instance, experience the wear and tear because those in the central cities were laid a century or so ago. Periodic renovation is a matter of urgency but is not done by citing issues like funds crunch. The water bodies across India remain largely polluted and many of these emanate stench. The Clean Ganga project, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi shortly after he came to power in 2014 with a fund outlay of Rs 20,000 crore has drawn a blank in the past seven years. The holy river remains as polluted as ever and the money sunk into the project has gone waste.

As is the wont today, politicians and bureaucrats might have shared the spoils and enriched themselves. So too with the other such cleaning missions. What is reported from Japan is a wake-up call to India as well. The health of the common man is seriously affected by the establishment's failure to ensure quality drinking water to the people. With governing entities changing after every five years, the onus keeps shifting from one to the next and even urgent matters are ignored. No one is accountable in the long term.

# Pulling the tail of the elephant

By Albert Thyrniang

"Pull the tail of a cat and it will turn around in no time. But pull the tail of an elephant; it might turn slowly. If pulled once the elephant may not even bother to respond. If you pull it several times it may turn slowly." These were the words of a church leader during a talk recently. He gave this analogy in the context of the demand for the greater role and involvement of women and lay people in the Catholic Church. So, he continues, "The Church is a 2000 year old big elephant. It is a 2000 year old tradition. Changes will not automatically come. Women and lay people have to continue to assert themselves for the Church to give women and lay people a greater say."

The bishop is right. The Church has been heavily patriarchal and clerical for ages. Of course, this mindset of the Church was inherited from society. But as an agent of change, the Church should not remain enslaved to the past and to traditions. Due to the constant 'pulling of the tail' of the Church, particularly in recent years, things are in for a change. In May this year, Pope Francis appointed a 52-year-old French nun, Nathalie Becquart, who was a consultant since 2019, and under secretary to the Synod of Bishops with voting rights. This is for the first time that a female is selected in a position that advises the Pope on crucial issues taken up by the Church. Two other women joined the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops on Young People and Faith as consultants. Earlier women had participated in Synods and other assemblies as observers, advisers, auditors and experts but none had voting rights. The head of the Synod, Cardinal Mario Grech said that the historic decision could 'open the doors for more women to emulate. The Vatican News, the Holy See's official press website was picked up by the world press widely reporting that in the past numerous Synodal fathers emphasised on the need for a place and role of women in the Church. Of particular interest is that Pope Francis highlighted several times that women be more involved in the processes of discussion and decision making in the Church.

Becquart, who could be the first woman to cast a vote along with bishops and cardinals, elatedly views the news as evidence that the Church's "clericalist mindset is changing" as more and more women assume high-level decision-making responsibilities in the Catholic hierarchy. The Church seems to be 'listening' but to end the attitude of the clerical Church which has also come along

with abuses – power and other kinds, is just the beginning. The 'attitudinal' change is beginning to take shape after voices were loudly raised. The Holy See's approved Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR) and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) in the United States and others have been harping of the need and importance for women's greater role in the life of the Church. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious in Rome in 2019 called for change in this regard. In the LCWR conference in August this year its president even 'chastised the church, its bishops' for their 'sinful acts'.

In India the change is even slower. Women continue to complain that they are being discriminated against by being kept out of decision making in male controlled bodies of the Church. Women have highlighted that they

of a large tree with children, young men and women, the elders, the differently-abled, the nuns, priests and bishops underneath it says so but does it happen in reality? The patriarchal dominance, clericalist outlook, discrimination, abuses, racism and casteism and women's right within the Church might strongly surface. This could be the best opportunity for change.

As elsewhere, a huge 'elephant' that is slow to turn is the tradition pertaining to participation of women in the Dorbar Shnong (village council) and other traditional bodies in Meghalaya. Recently the CEM of Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC), Titostarwell Chyne (Khain?) stated that, 'A woman as headman is an issue' in the Khasi society. He gives his stamp on women participating in Dorbar Shnong, but was at his best in categorically emphasising that for

sarpanch – best sarpanch in India, 8 women sarpanches who lead by example; Forty percent of all sarpanches across country are women, Five female sarpanches doing stellar work in their villages, Bold and promising: meet women sarpanches. These and other stories are proof of the successes of women village heads across India. Is the job of a sarpanch easy? Are their duties and responsibilities simple? Do they not face hardships? Yet women sarpanches have excelled. If women sarpanches can handle their job in other parts of this country why can't women in Meghalaya be Rangbah Shnong? Do we mean to say that our women are less capable than women in other states of the country? Is the argument acceptable?

This is nothing but prejudice. It is just that men who are and who have been in authority 'from time immemorial' are not willing to part with the concentration of power from their hands. Traditions that hold back the growth and process of a society are obsolete and hence alternation is the only option. A tradition that discriminates has no place in the 21st century. Simple! Tradition should not be an excuse for the reluctance to change. Women have performed equally well, and in many cases, better than men wherever there is a level playing field. For how many years now have girls been out-performing boys in public examinations? It is certain that given a chance women will perform well as Rangbah Shnong. Some will surely outshine their male counterparts? Is that the fear for the ban on women headmen? KHADC has tabled the Khasi Inheritance of Property Bill 2021 on the first day of its current Autumn session to ensure equitable distribution of property among the children - male and female. Though a general custom for ancestral property is that it devolves on the youngest daughter, there is no law that forbids parents to bequeath their property to male children. Many men have acquired land from their parents. So where is the need for such a bill? Where is the urgency? To me, a bill for women's greater participation in the institution of the Rangbah Shnong, Lyngdoh, Dolloi, Raid, Syiemship and Nokmaship is of more significance than the Inheritance of Property Bill. The job of a headman is difficult. Let only women who think they can do justice to it be the candidates. Don't debar everyone based on assumptions. Women and others who think they deserve better should continue to 'pull the tail of the elephant.'

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**"Traditions that hold back the growth and process of a society are obsolete and hence alternation is the only option. A tradition that discriminates has no place in the 21st century. Simple! Tradition should not be an excuse for the reluctance to change. Women have performed equally well, and in many cases, better than men wherever there is a level playing field."**

have little say in the policy making in liturgy, worship, theology and practices of the church, including those that affect them.

Perhaps, responding to the call for change, Pope Francis, on Oct. 10, 2021, officially opened a two-year process called Synod 2021-2023: For a "Synodal" or some term is, "a synod on synodality," of the Church; meaning "Walking together." 'Synod' is not just a 'body of bishops' representing the Church but it should involve the whole Church, according to the pope. Different from the other Synods (meetings of bishops) matters of consideration for this synod will come directly from every 'baptized' person – children, young people, the elderly, the handicapped and even those who have left the Church. Through meetings and discussions that the pope calls 'listening', the questions below (and more) will emerge: How synodal (together) is the Church? How much involvement and participation of every member is there in the Church? Are all the members walking together? The attractive logo of the Synod

them to be Rangbah Shnong (headmen) violates tradition and has nothing to do with gender equality and hence unacceptable. He is further quoted as saying, "There are complications and we will have to see from all angles as the duties and responsibilities of the Rangbah Shnong are not so simple; it involves a lot of hardships."

This argument does not hold water. In other parts of India women are legally elected Sarpanches (village headmen) under the Panchayati Raj system, the counterpart of the institution of the Rangbah Shnong in Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Many female Sarpanches are doing much better than men. Please go to Google and find out how women have successfully overcome deep-seated cultural resistance to usher change as the head of village councils or gram panchayats in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, etc. where men had earlier failed. A search for "Women Sarpanch" yields the following online reports: "These 10 Female Sarpanches are leading a Quiet Revolution; Bhakti Sharma youngest

**SC irked by UP govt's inaction on Lakhimpur-Kheri**

## Yogi in a Modi-brand copycat act of dragging feet

By Sushil Kutty

Whoever said the Supreme Court of India speaks in riddles was talking in riddles because the apex court on Monday spoke plain and straight; no beating around the proverbial bush, telling the Uttar Pradesh Government that it did not believe one whit bit that the Yogi Adityanath regime was doing what it was told to do – a proper job of investigating the October 3 Lakhimpur-Kheri violence – which left eight people dead on the spot – and filing a status report.

The Supreme Court wasn't convinced or impressed with the counsel of the UP Government. It was dissatisfied with the state government's response. The top court expressed disappointment, which some say is the apex court's default status when not satisfied with progress in any case. "This is not going the way we expected," the bench of CJI Ramana and Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli pronounced on November 8.

The Lakhimpur-Kheri violence left eight people brutally killed and it is a monumental shame that the Uttar Pradesh Government has to be told about its administrative, ethical and moral duty. The Supreme Court is also "unhappy" that witnesses are being "mixed" in various FIR. The top court has said it will appoint a former judge of a "different high court to monitor the probe in the case." Earlier the court had remarked "hundreds of farmers, why only 23 witnesses?"

The father-sun Mishra duo of Lakhimpur-Kheri may or may not be physically involved in the October 3 violence, but it's rather strange there is no media coverage on the current status of the case, about what all the UP Government was doing? It is a shame the Supreme Court cannot pull up media for not poking its nose sufficiently enough into the case and for not questioning the Yogi Adityanath Government for going slow.



Great! But why should anybody accept and adhere to what the "way we (SC) expected"? There is no hard and fast rule, is there? The fact is, no amount of disappointment and cribbing will change the way some regimes behave. There are always black sheep. And like the saying goes, such people/governments understand only tough talk and strict action. It will take more than a rap on the knuckle to discipline the Uttar Pradesh

What's the UP Government waiting for? For the elections to be over! The wait is on for the 2022 UP assembly elections to be done and dusted with. Yogi Adityanath fancies his and his party's chances and hopes to retain power. But the elections are still five maybe six months away and till then nothing can be left to precipitate matters. Nobody wants an election-eve setback. The top court's questions are "awkward"

*It is also no secret that Yogi has taken a leaf out of the Modi playbook – let things hang and hope people will lose interest and forget! Prime Minister Narendra Modi is 'Mr. Alacrity' only in offshore locations – "One Sun, One World, One Grid and One Narendra Modi..." Otherwise, he takes "dragging the feet" to new great lengths. Look at what is being done on the "Teni front".*

Government. It is also no secret that Yogi has taken a leaf out of the Modi playbook – let things hang and hope people will lose interest and forget! Prime Minister Narendra Modi is 'Mr. Alacrity' only in offshore locations – "One Sun, One World, One Grid and One Narendra Modi..." Otherwise, he takes "dragging the feet" to new great lengths. Look at what is being done on the "Teni front". The MoS (Home) appears to have slipped off Modi's mind and off the Modi Government's radar.

and upsetting. Like "Why only Ashish Mishra's phone has been seized?" November 8, the Supreme Court said, "We think you are dragging your feet. Please dispel that impression." CJI NV Ramana and Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli spoke tough. The bench had taken up the matter on October 7. On October 20 senior advocate Harish Salve appeared for the Uttar Pradesh government. Salve has since then been found fumbling for answers to pointed questions.

So, instead of settling for expressions of disappointment, India's top court should take things into its own hands and punish, not just pull up, the Yogi Adityanath Government unfavourably for failing to follow the top court's orders. India is not a banana republic and UP is no suburb. The judiciary should bare its spine and stop "dragging its feet", the exact same words used by the top court on November 8 to express dissatisfaction with the UP Government's action taken report.

There is a feeling the UP Government does not want independent witnesses. There appears to be apprehension the witnesses might speak unpalatable things in court, unpalatable to the UP Government and to the BJP. The top court has instructed the SIT probing the case to "protect vulnerable witnesses", stating that the witnesses can be "browbeaten." Harish Salve had no answer to the question, "Why only four witness statements have been recorded?" Harish Salve is a top lawyer. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

**Govt's whims and fancies**

Editor, The manner in which districts are created in Meghalaya has always been politically motivated. Mairang has become a district because its MLA, true to his name (Metbah Lyngdoh) is a giant among politicians and has the clout to get the MDA Government to kowtow to his demands. Of course the people of Mairang will be beneficiaries of this largesse and Metbah Lyngdoh is unlikely to ever lose another election henceforth. But the mere creation of a district will only create so many jobs. Not all the eligible youth will be absorbed in government service otherwise the state will go bankrupt paying salaries only to the few privileged government employees. Five districts have been created in Garo Hills but their condition remains pathetic when one looks at the roads and bridges, many of which sorely need repair but are left neglected. Now there are seven districts in Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Mark my words there will be

a demand for one more district in Garo Hills to balance the equations. What is the purpose of creating a district if that district is going to be left unattended and its roads and infrastructure are in a shambles. South Garo Hills was neglected for a long time after it was named a district. I wonder if things are better there today. There has to be a vision as to why a district is created. Is it really needed to expand government facilities to the residents? Will that district suddenly discover its potentials and will it have better healthcare infrastructure and educational institutions? Will people then have better nutritional status? Can someone please explain the criteria for creating a district?

Yours etc., W. Pyngrape, Via email

**Confusion worst confounded**

Editor, The desire of a large populace to be part of varied changes in the state is

indeed a welcome step and the people of Mairang have shown the right way by demanding district and being patient with their dreams. However, this dream has not materialized without getting entangled in a series of naming and determining the right name for the new upcoming district. From the geographical point of view Mairang is pointed as 25.57 degree North and 91.63 degree East at an elevation of 5131 feet above sea level but the way it has been taken and put out as "Eastern West" defies all geographical argument that only "geniuses" in the State secretariat could be able to explain to academicians.

Yours etc., Dominic Stadlin Wankhar, Shillong

**English a destitute language**

Editor, Well, Meghalaya is all set to have a new district. Some say it's just a political gimmick to fool the people to earn some extra votes. (As if such a thing is something

new, novel and unique that has just been discovered and needs to be advertised! Truth is it happens all the time; all of us are party to such gullibility and it's weird because none of us dare admit we are active and willing suckers to this political con game). Others say the creation of the new district will bring administration and governance closer to the people. Well 70 years down the line after Independence this claim has yet to prove itself, so none of us are the wiser to such political claims. Some who are really desperate for a livelihood claim that a new district will bring in more jobs. If the desperation for Government jobs has reached such levels that we lose sight of the cost benefit ratio of such actions, then there is nothing much more to be said, is there?

Now aside from the above groups of citizens with their varied views on the new district of Meghalaya, there is another group with another different concern over the creation of the proposed Eastern West Khasi Hills District. English teachers and professors from various educational institutions of the state recently had an urgent meeting to discuss

and resolve on the proposed name for the new district and its impact on the English language. The consensus that emerged from this meeting is that English, in the light of naming the new district of Meghalaya, continues to remain a poor Universal language that still requires enrichment with new words with new meanings. Students of English and rationalists should therefore welcome this new contradiction in direction known as Eastern West of something. It's like saying the front of my rear! The meeting concluded with the resolve to write to Oxford and Cambridge to include the turn of phrase 'Eastern West' in their definition of utter unadulterated nonsense.

Yours etc., Toki Blah, Via email

**Honest people still exist!**

Editor! With a deep sense of gratitude I would like to place before the people of Shillong that honest people do exist in our city. These days, we

come across incidents almost on a daily basis where a number of robberies occur, especially theft of mobile phones, particularly from senior citizens across the country. However, I have an exciting incident to narrate to the people of Shillong. We have such wonderful and honest people in our city. I lost my new mobile phone on November 8 and I could not trace it. To my utter surprise and delight the driver of the Maximo mini van bearing no. ML 01 7086, Bah Barius Nongphud, a father of three little children brought the phone to my residence and handed it over to me. I have no words to express my heartfelt gratitude to this young driver and I salute him for his honesty. Wish we could see more such faithful and honest people in our city.

Yours etc., Dr. K. Thomas Gospel Clinic, Itshyrwat Shillong 22

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of *The Shillong Times*

*"When a thing ceases to be a subject of controversy, it ceases to be a subject of interest."*

— William Hazlitt

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LXIV No. 91 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2021

**Everything's in a name**

THE Khasi-Pnar people spend much time and deliberation in choosing a name for their off-springs or those of a family member. Usually a man's sister/sisters (knia-kha) choose a name for his off-springs (ki khun-kha) because it is auspicious and brings luck. In fact, Khasis are also known to believe in divination before choosing a name so that it does not bring bad luck. Sadly, while naming new districts in Meghalaya it appears that only a few political heads have appropriated the right to choose the name for every new district created till date. Not all wisdom resides in politicians. If it did, we would not find ourselves at the crossroads today.

The new district baptised (hopefully not by fire) Eastern West Khasi Hills is a tongue-twister, a jaw breaker and a convoluted one at best — rolled longitudinally upon itself. Now no one is really clear about where exactly in the four cardinal points and their in-between locations, the new district fits. The name of Meghalaya's 12th district is truly inscrutable even for a post-man who is a master at finding directions. At the moment the new district sounds like a place where the both rises and sets. Is there such a place in the universe? What is the reason behind this impenetrable phrase?

At the moment the name Eastern West Khasi Hills, apart from being the subject of hilarious memes on social media also seems to have set off a mental discord and a geographical imbalance of sorts. There is more than just sound and alphabetical symbols to language. A name expresses the individuality of a person and in this case that of a place too. Mairang district would have resonated with every citizen including the people of that new district although there are many other villages that comprise the new district. The Chief Minister would do well to share the secret as to how he and his colleague Metbah Lyngdoh, the Speaker and the chief architect of the new district arrived and other wise elders arrived at this name. They owe it to the people of the state and the new district. It could be a learning experience for all to understand the processes involved while choosing a name for a new district. Having created a furore with the geographical conundrum, it is expected that the matter will be hotly debated in the Assembly before the name is given a full and final seal. After all, in a democracy no individual or group has the right to give the final seal of approval on any matter without a public debate and above all legislative consent.

**The police - politician - crime nexus**

By Rajdeep Sardesai

'Tamasha' is a great Maharashtra folk dance tradition that literally means 'fun' and 'entertainment'. In the last few months, a political 'tamasha' is playing out in Maharashtra which would be almost farcical if it were not so disgustingly immoral. Allegations are flying thick and fast: from drugs to underworld links and from extortion rackets to benami transactions, it's open season in Maharashtra's tryst with crime and politics. A Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) officer who arrests the son of one of Hindi cinema's biggest ever stars is now himself being investigated for fraud and extortion. A former Mumbai police commissioner is 'untraceable' since May this year according to the Mumbai Crime Branch and a non-bailable warrant has been issued. The former home minister who the absconding police commissioner accused of 'vasooli' (extortion) is arrested after evading Enforcement Directorate summons for months. The deputy chief minister's alleged benami properties worth more than a 1000 crores have been attached. A former chief minister and his wife are also caught in a snake-pit of hit and run vendetta politics. A bizarre game of smear and shame is being enacted where the lines between crime, policing and politicians are totally blurred.

Take the curious case of Samir Wankhede, the Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer deputed as Mumbai's key drug-buster last year. Over the years, the smooth talking Wankhede has built a reputation of taking on Mumbai's rich and famous. Ever since the NCB intervened last year in the Sushant Singh Rajput case, arrested Sushant's girlfriend Rhea Chakrabarty and hauled up a number of stars to appear before it, Wankhede has routinely made the headlines. His critics accuse him of harassing the glamour world as part of a well-oiled extortion racket while his supporters credit him with putting rule of law above VVIP status.

The latest controversy has further polarized public opinion because leading the charge against Wankhede is Nawab Malik, a plain-speaking NCP minister in the ruling coalition arrangement and one of the few prominent Muslim political faces left in a political eco-system which is increasingly majoritarian.

When Malik produces documents accusing Wankhede of fraud and extortion, he isn't as much taking an anti-corruption stand as being accused of carrying out a personal crusade against an officer who arrested his son-in-law. Matters which should play out in a court of law are now being reduced to a media circus where the joke seems to be on the ordinary citizen. Instead of addressing the specific charge of faking a caste certificate to get entry into the IRS, Wankhede has petitioned the SC/ST commission against alleged harassment of a Dalit officer. A 'Muslim' minister taking on a 'Dalit' investigator, the battle-lines are being drawn

into a high profile probe officer when he could just as easily be approaching a court? And why is the story of a 3000 kg heroin haul at the Adani-operated Mundra port so easily buried while a star-son's alleged tryst with a few grams of drugs is a national obsession? Perhaps when due process is subverted at all times, then it becomes almost impossible to separate truth from fiction.

Ditto the case with Parambir Singh, the police officer in hiding. Singh is an IPS officer who, like Wankhede, is seen to have revealed in Mumbai's bright lights. As Mumbai police commissioner, Singh was holding a prize post

by both the Mumbai police and the National Investigation Agency. How could the entire might of the police force, both at the state and Centre have allowed an officer to just 'disappear'? Unless, as the buzz on the Mumbai street is, this is a police officer who just knows too much. And while Deshmukh's multiple attempts to evade arrest have failed, the Maharashtra government pretends as if all is well. The same Nawab Malik who produces daily documents to nail Wankhede doesn't have a word to say about the sinful behavior of his senior NCP colleague.

Truth is, in a politically surcharged atmosphere with several ministers and legislators being investigated for various acts of alleged corruption — only those who have joined the BJP can 'sleep soundly' admitted a former Congress MLA recently — Mumbai's worst kept secrets have come tumbling out. The gleaming city of gold co-exists with a metropolis of grime where law enforcement agencies have been thoroughly compromised by the high stakes involved.

In a sense, the chickens have come home to roost. In 1993, the Vohra commission report was submitted by a former home secretary and it pointed to the well-trenched nexus of criminals, politicians and government officials. Brought out against the backdrop of the 1993 Mumbai blasts and the role of the underworld and the Dawood Ibrahim gang in particular, the report was a grave indictment of a corrupted 'syndicate' of the powerful. Sadly, the Vohra report has gathered dust, with the entire findings yet to be made public despite assurances given by different governments. Why will they when the truth could be inconvenient to all?

Post-script: In Mumbai's film whirl, there is speculation that Wankhede wants a biopic made around his life story. If an IRS officer believes that he is now a larger than life character worth depicting on celluloid, why blame him? Twenty years ago, Mumbai's encounter cops too acquired instant fame and then notoriety. Some of them have since been in and out of jail. As the classic film song goes: "Ganda hai par dhandha hai."

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in a manner that threatens to blow up into an ominous caste-communal inferno.

Lost in the fiery war of words are the 'real' questions that remain unaddressed. Should an agency like the NCB which is meant to handle international and

reserved for the cadre's best and brightest. He appeared to be the Maharashtra government's chosen one until the Antilla car bomb case, where a Scorpio car with gelatin explosives found outside the house of the country's richest business magnate, exposed the seamier side

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inter-state drug network connections be now looking out for a few grams of ganja on a cruise ship? Why must investigations be carried out in full media glare with a dubious list of witnesses and where the urge to appear before a TV camera seems to overwhelm the need for a rigorous probe? Where does an IRS officer get the funds to lead what is by all accounts a rather opulent lifestyle? Why should a minister be carrying out a parallel investigation

of the city's crime-police nexus. When within days of being removed from the top police post, Singh accused the state home minister Anil Deshmukh of demanding a monthly Rs 100 crores as 'vasooli', he only further exposed the rot within: the men in khaki were not just accomplices of the netas but partners in crime.

Today, Singh has reportedly disappeared, a scandalous escape if true. This is a top cop on the run who is wanted

**Education and Politics: The oddly necessary coupling**

By TFL-Mawlong

As we've seen, our matriculation pass rate has been averaging around 55% for the last ten years. While the statistics are disheartening enough, there is a more fundamental problem here. Evidence suggests that even high scorers and rank holders have been victims of 'Swiss cheese learning.' Though their learning appears to be perfect from the outside, their education is 'full of holes.' Our flawed education system has been masked by the exams that have been so dumb, to the point where a student can get a perfect score in science or mathematics while having no real understanding of the underlying concepts.

It is easy to rail against the poor pass percentage. But I'll go a step further and say that even the most successful students benefited greatly from the customary grace marks. For many teachers, passing the marginal students, or inflating student scores to 60 percent or 80 percent etc., may seem like kindness or simply an administrative necessity. In effect, however, it is a disservice and a lie. We are effectively telling students that they have learned a lot and are ready for more difficult topics in higher classes when in reality, there is a huge learning gap, and we are preparing them to fail to even understand what is going on in higher classes.

The issue is no less acute at the college level. In this rat race for NAAC grade, at times, things resemble a circus. Colleges are becoming busier holding cool, superficial, and sometimes pretentious programs, workshops, and seminars to create the 'illusion' of work and progress while blatantly ignoring the serious problem of 'learning poverty.' If you don't believe me, consider getting into any college for a full year or two before a NAAC peer team visit.

So, how do we plug the holes in Swiss cheese Learning? Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, on whose birthday, November 11, we are celebrating National Education Day said, "We must not forget, it is the birth-right of every individual to receive at least the basic education without which he cannot fully discharge his duties as a citizen." I'll go so far as to say that "learning is a birth-right of every individual." We may have granted many people the right to education, but what about every student's right to learn? How many of us care whether the students are learning?

It almost appears like a circus to see many schools and college teachers holding a placard with the caption "SAVE CAMPUS, SAVE EDUCATION, SAVE NATION, DISCARD NEP" and going social on the last Teacher's Day. Is this a joke? Do we not see the learning poverty in schools and colleges? The current educational system, which is based on the 18th-century Prussian model (you can Google it), has not been fundamentally rethought in more than a century. Today, the system has become so heavy with orthodoxy and rust that it suffocates genuine creative efforts for change and for improving learning outcomes. The current system was created in a world without global inter-connectedness, DNA awareness, computers, the internet, or artificial intelligence. Today the world has moved on, and we must re-imagine education. If you ask me, NEP 2020 is a refreshingly progressive framework with one foot out of the old, even though it is still fundamentally based on an old model. Is NEP 2020 the panacea for education's ills? No one can be so certain. But, does NEP represent the best opportunity to move us away from the current state of 'learning poverty' and toward learning for everyone and everywhere? It most emphatically does.

Rather than resisting the new progressive change, or waiting for some magical change to happen to us, or 'experts' to tell us what to think, believe, or do, I would like to see us pro-actively welcoming the new framework with curiosity, courage, and creativity. Stakeholders must delve deeper into the chaos that has pervaded our educational system for decades, and the NEP 2020 should then be creatively implemented.

In the long run, however, genuine change in education will not come from the old world leaders, or armchair experts and public administrators, or a static government policy. No, real change will come from the ripples we-the many of us-start spreading in the water—from our willingness to embrace the necessity of change, perhaps beginning with the Assembly election in 2023.

Maulana Azad can serve as an inspiration to the youth with political aspirations. At 35 years Azad became the Congress party's youngest leader. He helped to shape many policies, particularly those relating to education, in the constituent assembly. And throughout his 40-year public career, he was the most outspoken advocate for a high standard of education across the country.

Meghalaya requires such political stalwarts who can advocate for high educational standards and will not compromise on that front. Meghalaya urgently requires an elected body capable of dealing with educational issues. However, the mere presence of bureaucrats or academicians in a political party does not imply that they can effectively come up with a visionary educational policy. We must tread carefully. We have too few true academicians. We must identify them from among a sea of pseudo and anti-academicians who have no vision, no proper understanding of education, and teach rote learning their entire lives.

A political party that includes some educational visionaries (not necessarily academicians) has the potential to become knowledgeable about and pay attention to educational issues. Such a party when elected would also be strong enough to push for much-needed educational reforms, most likely against the teaching community's resistance.

The political parties of Meghalaya have one year to analyze and research educational issues, train political leaders on educational issues, and develop the best five-year education plan. This time, as citizens, we will scrutinize each political party's manifesto on education. Simply including a positive statement about education in their manifestos will not suffice. We need to see more than just a statement. We need to see a strong emphasis on the educational roadmap and value of innovation, details of the plan, and an honest attempt to quantify additional investment and funding in school education. We need or to see a hope that you can take us out of learning poverty.

And while we're at it, do we really need an elected body that can't even agree on a simple and proper district name? Sure, the new district is in the 'Eastern part of West Khasi Hills,' but by that logic, it is also in the 'Western part of East Khasi Hills.' Geographically, it is the central part of the Khasi Hills. And if Markyrwat is called South-West, Mairang district is more like North-East. Why should it bear the name of 'West Khasi Hills' just because it was carved out of the West Khasi Hills District when it is going to be a full-fledged district of Meghalaya like all other districts? While the rest of the district names have geographical significance, this one is more 'socio-political.' The perplexing mix-up in the name 'Eastern West' reminds one of a 'transgender joke!' You know, a complicated 'it' outside the 'He' and 'She.'

After 50 years of statehood, problems have begun to mount, and lack of creativity for a solid educational framework complicates these problems. May Maulana Azad's legacy in education inspire the next lot to lead our state wisely and progressively after 2023.

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Letters to the Editor

**Winter arrives, beware!**

Editor, While Covid took a heavy toll on our citizens, we also heard of the sad news of hospitals catching fire. The Meghalaya Assembly building was razed to the ground in winter of 2001 and several Assam type buildings after that. It is unfortunate that so far no one has bothered to do a post-mortem on these fires. The sad news keeps occupying news space. To get some idea, let us begin with a pole fuse used in the 1960s. The fuse is a device made of tin that breaks the connection when the current is way beyond the permissible limit.

In those years, there were few houses and so in case of accidental use of appliances of huge kilowatts the fuse snaps thereby preventing a fire. A lineman at the sub-station would be informed and would readily come with a ladder to fix a new fuse on that pole, which is known as an egg fuse because of its shape. With time the population has increased and so has the number of houses. The lineman alone was not adequate to man all the homes. So the pole fuse was fixed in the meter box

equipped with a seal and any one tampering with the seal to change the fuse (what are called kit-kats) was bound to be punished.

But with very little manpower to attend to complaints, the seal became defunct and the meter box turned into a plaything of any person who could use a screwdriver. Wires of vehicles or any electrical appliances, capable of carrying hundreds of amperes get fixed into the kit-kat. And in the event of a short circuit, the cables melt and fire begins to lick the dry heavily painted or oiled beam. The Assam Type buildings with ceilings above the room and with dry clothes and mattress around only add fuel to raging fire. This is the reason why the Assam Type houses are vulnerable.

Sometime ago the central government had advocated the use of MCBs (miniature circuit breakers). If this was used, instead of short-circuit the circuit would break and the switch would automatically go off. Trying to restore the switch with the short-circuit not rectified will cause the switch to go up again. But at times when lightning strikes, then a switching up will automatically happen on the circuit. The MECL had once

got an order from the Power Ministry to install the MCB in the meter box so that even if internal kit-kats are meddled with, the main one in the meter box will break the circuit and buildings and most important of all lives would be saved. Oxygen ventilators are known to consume high wattage. Hence many of the hospital fires might have been the absence of MCB (costs only Rs 450 each), which during the pre-Covid days might not have been required. If the government could subsidise the cost of the MCB for the benefit of all our poor users of electricity, many lives and buildings will be saved. Of course those who can afford it should not tax this poor government.

Yours etc., J Kharmih, Via email

**Afflicted by photophobia**

Editor, Among all the states in India, I am convinced that Meghalaya suffers from the most cases of photophobia where people are sensitive to light. And I am convinced that the vast majority of Meghalayans suffering from this

condition are the politicians and the senior bureaucrats.

This observation must be correct as the cars of almost all politicians and senior bureaucrats (oh, how I love the word "senior") have dark tinted windows and rear windshield glasses. I am sure that this modification has not been made for security reasons. Or for the intent of carrying out nefarious activities within the confines of the car! No, no, this cannot be; unthinkable! These respected people must be suffering from the fear of light! And I thought that this ailment was there only in the capital city of Shillong. But I'm wrong — it has spread to the other districts of the state!

To support my observation further, have you noticed how a majority of this category of respected people shield their eyes with dark glasses day and night? In fact, I won't be surprised if the first thing that a newly elected MLA does is to buy a pair of dark shades! After all, this seems to be the fashionable thing among those circles, just like part of the attire of the mafia. But they all have got it all wrong, they are outdated. Recent medical research has suggested that the best shades for photophobia folks are pink tinted

goggles. This I would love to see!

Since a ruling of the hon'ble Supreme Court strictly prohibits the use of tinted glass in cars, with some exceptions that do not include photophobia, would the Meghalaya DHS, medical research institutions and individual researchers please study this phenomenon in Meghalaya and suggest cures and remedies before other groups in the population are affected with this affliction. Please, I don't want to wear pink tinted shades!

Yours etc., Eugene D. Thomas, Shillong - 6 Camp: Tura

**Wanted a robust agricultural policy**

Editor It's a great achievement that a woman who has been engaged in cultivation and farming in the rural interiors of Laskain C&RD Block was recently conferred the Padma Shri. This is a true reflection of the hard work of women in Meghalaya who have brought laurels to the

State. Kong Trinity Saioo the Padma Shri awardee has been at the forefront in community work by supporting farming households through various agricultural and horticultural activities in collaboration with village dorbars and other developmental agencies as well of the government. The Padma Shri is an honour to the zeal and selflessness of Kong Saioo who ignited the minds of the farming community in West Jaintia Hills by empowering them to set up self help groups. The farmers are usually a neglected lot. Kong Saioo has brought them to the foreground. We need a robust farmer-friendly state policy which is presently lacking. If the State envisions an agricultural policy that is inclusive and progressive it will go a long way in ensuring that the accrued benefits trickle down to the farmers who are the backbone of the economy of Meghalaya.

Yours etc... Dominic Stadlin Wankhar Shillong

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

*"Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue."*

— Barry Goldwater

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 92 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2021

### Delhi declaration

AFGHANISTAN was at the centre of two geopolitical engagements this week – with India hosting an eight-nation regional meet of National Security Advisers on Wednesday and Pakistan matching it with a meeting of the Troika Plus – drawing in the US, Russia and China – a day later. Curiously, Russia took part in both the meetings. The first meeting, hosted by NSA Ajit Doval, ended with a Delhi Declaration, in which a joint resolution said Afghanistan's land should not be used by anyone for "sheltering, training, planning or financing" terrorism. The call was also to remove hurdles in the way of funds flow to the cash-strapped nation, and inclusion -- by the ruling Taliban -- of all interest-groups in the country in the administrative and political structures of Afghanistan. It also stressed on the protection and promotion of the rights of women, children and minority groups.

While all these are important matters, how much leverage these participating nations -- Russia, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan apart from India -- have on the ruling establishment or the Taliban per se, is the big question. Both Russia and Iran are big names while the others have minor clout. India has its strength, though its application is a different matter. A warning by Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath that if Afghanistan created problems for India in Kashmir Valley, fighter planes are "ready" to take on the Taliban is perhaps an expression of the mood in the ruling BJP. India remains a soft power. The soft-peddling of India's defence push over the past decades has kept it in a weak position. Saying that we have a large arsenal or fighter jets alone will not do. Those who led the nation were not ready and willing for a confrontation and opted, so far, to follow the path of peace -- meaning a lack of guts for confrontation. This was evident also in the recent provocations from China in Ladakh, Doklam on the Bhutanese side, and elsewhere on the Line of Actual Control, or even the LoC on the Pakistani side.

The past 20 years saw China emerging as a super power in both military and economic terms. Beijing is now keen on checkmating India here, there and everywhere. India's scope for confrontation has further reduced. Worse, China's collusion with Pakistan and now with Afghanistan too further complicates regional geopolitics. The Delhi declaration, per se, means little. Russia has already developed cold feet on many of the "calls" contained in the Declaration. Afghanistan "welcoming" the Declaration by itself means little, too.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Reopen Pine Walk gate

Editor,  
We all know the role played by the South Shillong Assembly Constituency, MLA, Sanbor Shullai in shifting the gate erected by 58 Gorkha Training Centre (GTC) at Mawshbit village to another location for ease of movement of the people of that village. We are all aware too that the Pine Walk gate is under lock and key for more than a year, after the city came under lockdown due to Covid. This is causing major inconveniences to the public. This is an important thoroughfare to move between the town's commercial hub, Police Bazar and localities in Greater Laban and other adjoining villages. Not only does a shortcut pass through the Cantonment area but the Pine Walk lane is actually a papacea for the residents of the town in the horrible traffic mess that grips the town every single day. Locking the Pine Walk gate is another show of muscle power by the army authorities. I therefore urge upon the Hon'ble MLA and Minister, Mr Sanbor Shullai to intervene, in a similar manner as he did in case of the GTC gate, and reopen the same. It will be a big relief for the commoners who have to spend precious time stranded in traffic congestion. At the same time, it is unrealistic on the part of

the Cantonment authorities to keep this gate shut when the pandemic scenario has improved drastically and everything has opened up. I am sure Mr Shullai can effect a solution in the interest of the people of Greater Laban and other people of the town.

Yours etc,  
BC Paul  
Shillong - 4

#### Humanitarian crises in Afghanistan

Editor,  
The UN estimates that nearly half of Afghanistan's population, is facing severe hunger in the coming months. This apart, 3.2 million children under the age of 5, are expected to suffer from severe malnutrition by the end of the year. Against this backdrop, it is of enormous importance that the international community finds a way to address the humanitarian emergency. Considering that it must be done without provoking the Taliban and without failing to take into account the Taliban's record of violation of human rights, it is an enormous task. Even before the Taliban took control, Afghanistan was facing humanitarian crisis. Years of violence, severe drought and disruptions had caused acute poverty. The fall of the government to the Taliban aggravated the crisis. The

# New District: Expectations amid Celebrations

By Banshanlang Marwein

What could be described as the most awaited aspirations of the people of Mairang Civil Sub-Division has now turned into a reality - a historic moment indeed for everyone in the district. After approximately three decades since the demand for a district and 45 years of being a Sub-Division, Eastern West Khasi Hills, became the 12th District of Meghalaya on 10 November 2021. Many, on and off social media have 'ridiculed' that the 'name' of the district does not sound right whether grammatically or geographically. Even though I am weak in Geography, if I have to suggest a name then "Central Khasi Hills" is what best describes the new district.

West Khasi Hills District was bifurcated from East Khasi Hills in 1976 and the Mairang C & RD Block which was created in 1956 at the time of 'undivided' Assam was upgraded to a Civil Sub-division in 1976. According to the leaders in Mairang, the former MLA, (L) Fuller Lyngdoh along with other leaders had demanded that Mairang should be the headquarters of West Khasi Hills but its demand was ill-fated. This made them come up with black flag protests when the Sub-Division was inaugurated in 1976. Back in 1991 when Ri Bhoi, Mairang and others were queuing up for the demand to be upgraded to districts, ultimately only Ri Bhoi and South Garo Hills Districts were born on June 4, 1992 and June 18, 1992 respectively.

Through the archival records I could access, former MLA, (L) Kitor Syiem along with the Sordar Shnongs and the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO), Mr DP Wahlang held a meeting on October 10, 1996 and had brought out a blueprint for the proposed district. The SDO at that time had sought the opinion of the people of Mairang regarding the upgradation of the Sub-Division to a district. The demand did not die down, public meetings were held on various occasions and particularly in 2012 the demand gained momentum when the proposal for few more districts was tabled but Mairang again missed the bus and other new districts were created at that time i.e., East Jaintia Hills, South West Khasi Hills, South West Garo Hills and North Garo Hills. The Joint Action Committee

(a conglomeration of KSU, FKJGP, SSSP, SS Hima Nongkhlaw, Hima Nongkhlaw) had called for mass demonstration to seek support for the district demand. At that time some leaders including women were harassed and went on a hunger strike in Shillong and Mairang. The 'collective effort' of various stakeholders ranging from pressure groups like KSU, HYC, FKJGP etc, political parties, community leaders, ordinary citizens and MLAs among others merit mention.

The present MLAs, Brolding Nongsiej and Methab Lyngdoh have been instrumental in their capacity as MLAs, later as Ministers and Speaker to push forward till Mairang was officially upgraded to a District. West Khasi Hills was still the largest district (23% of total area of the state) of Meghalaya even after the bifurcation of the district in 2012. This makes the district stand as the lowest in terms of density of population but its literacy rate is higher than that of the State at 77% as opposed to 74% of the State (Census 2011). Yet these factors make West Khasi Hills be one of the backward districts in the state, where many of the UN Sustainable Development Goals are below par. The growing population and growing demands for development; the difficulty in cutting across red tape at every level made the demand for a district a necessity rather than just a want. However, one can also ask - how is the situation of the other districts in Meghalaya? Has there been any major upgradation, progress and improvement? Have people come closer to the administration? Is there any major development that has taken place? The people of these districts know fully well what exactly the situation is. So what can we expect from the 'New District'?

Knowing fully well that the state chequer is running dry one may wonder as to where and how the state will fund the new district but I am (not) sure the government is prepared for the same.

The district of course will also give employment opportunities to the youths in the region as the need for new departments and the enlargement of the existing ones will arise. The real problem

now is that the district administration will take some time to be fully functional. History tells a better story about it. Immediate focus for the 'New district' administration probably should be on road connectivity to distant villages. Roads are the main drivers of the economy and villagers should actually make use of the existence of a DC's office. Road access is especially imperative during health emergencies. Thanks to the ongoing road construction in a few villages within the district and the road from Mairang-Rani-Azra (MRA Road project) we will have a lifeline for trade and commerce among other services.

In the past two years when I visited various villages in erstwhile West Khasi Hills, one of the major problems is road connectivity especially when such places could be developed as major tourist hubs or could be easily accessible for farmers to transport their produce to the market. On the other hand, if we look at other issues such as education, the new District needs a government college of its own, and more government secondary and higher secondary schools and rejuvenation of existing ones. Health infrastructure should be upgraded with more doctors and other health workers in the Hospital, CHCs, PHCs, Sub-Centres so that it will cater to the immediate as well as long term need of the region.

The entire state of Meghalaya has 6+1 government colleges only of which 5 are in Garo Hills (including 1 upcoming Medical college), which is pretty unfair considering the population and area of Khasi and Jaintia Hills is larger. If at all there is an announcement for new government colleges, Mairang desperately needs one and the college should include other professional courses as well apart from the regular ones. Mairang is lucky to have many drop dead and pristine natural environments, however, such places need to be carefully balanced. The Tourism and Forest Departments should work in tandem while developing certain places as tourist destinations. Visitors need to be strictly cautioned not to pollute their trails otherwise the District might

become over-exposed if strict protocols are not in place. It's important to mention that the district is still highly dependent on agriculture hence if the Agri-horticulture department could 'practically' concentrate majorly on this sector, and make it sustainable for the needs of the people, things should move in the right direction.

The introduction of various missions and schemes such as piggery farming, poultry, especially aquaculture mission has no doubt benefited the farmers but what next? More focus on the locally rich produce should be in place. In fact, a common market for farmers in the district to sell these produce is the need of the hour. Participative efforts need to be critically studied in order that the people can actually see agriculture as a means of income because it is yet to be seen as one. When it comes to Sports and Youth affairs, another aspect is that the Government should concentrate on identifying many young talents from the region who are unable to show their full potential either because of lack of support or no support at all. There is an urgent need for a government funded stadium (indoor and outdoor) with proper sports infrastructure in place.

The basic and daily amenities should not be sidelined, i.e., sanitation and proper drinking water, accessible and uninterrupted network connectivity and there has to be an end to frequent power cuts. Water crisis and sanitation for Mairang town is an important issue which needs more ground work than just mere plans. The District needs proper sewage management system which must be prioritised in order that the main towns like Mairang and Kynshi will not suffer from the garbage crisis experienced by Jowai, Marten-Mawlai, Lewduh etc.

Having many administrative centres can of course cater to the needs of the people but the point here is various government departments should be made fully functional and development activities on the ground should be grounded sooner than later. Policy-makers need to think more in terms of people-centric policies and what actually the people need especially among those who still live from hand to mouth.

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### SIT clean chit to Modi in court again after a decade

## Zakia's pursuit of justice almost 20 years old

By Sushil Kutty

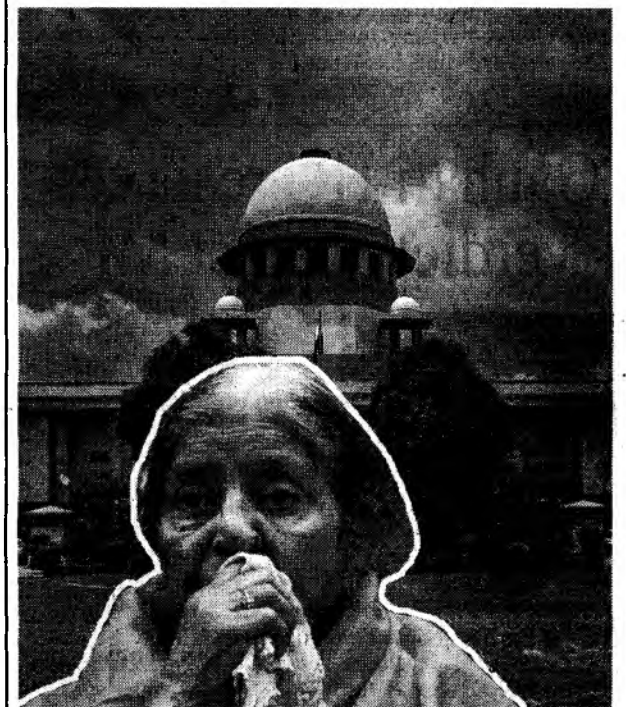
Zakia Jafri is at least a decade older than Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the way things are shaping up, it looks like Zakia will live long enough to see closure to the Gujarat riots case. Then Gujarat Chief Minister and now Prime Minister Narendra Modi was given a clean chit by the Special Investigation Team probing the case.

That was in 2012. Today, a decade later, Zakia is challenging the SIT's clean chit to Modi and though she appears quiet, but beneath the calm, what? The SIT, her lawyer Kapil Sibal says, chose to blindsight evidence like they didn't exist. The SIT also appeared to have come to baseless conclusions with no reason or logic to back them up. At least this is what got Zakia Jafri's goat.

So much so, she could do with some explanations

Minister of India in 2014! Did anything change? For Zakia nothing. She kept her determination to get to the light at the end of the tunnel alive. There were times when SIT and Zakia and Modi seemed to converge. Now, the top court has once again started hearing the case.

Kapil Sibal is arguing before the bench of Justices AM Khanwilkar, Dinesh Maheshwari and CT Ravikumar. Sibal told them he too was a "victim of communal violence" and harked back to Partition. That will not do, Sibal should stick to point. At an earlier hearing, he had told the court that "the issue goes beyond Gulberg society" and that Zakia's fight was about "law and order and administrative failure -- people were massacred because of police inaction... I just want the matter to be investigated... This is all



which make sense. You cannot expect an 81-year-old to sleep tight with unanswered questions jostling in the head! Zakia is the widow of Ehsan Jafri, the Congress MP, who was brutally murdered in the 2002 Gujarat riots. Murder most foul. But the SIT probing the riots is as if "Murder, yes, but 'foul' O! No."

Kapil Sibal disputed the SIT claims. The SIT did not do a clutch of things. For one, did not record statements and seize phones. Two, how were the bombs manufactured? Without any

about law and order and rights of individuals."

Sibal says forget the "high dignitaries", they don't matter. But they should not get clean chits. There was alleged conspiracy, "complicity of bureaucratic officials deliberate hate speeches and unleashing of violence. The SIT did not look at and into 23,000 pages of evidence."

Kapil Sibal oftentimes slips into a séance-like phase and then he is like a poet unleashed in prose: "There were people who were massacred because of police inaction. Where will people

*It now seems like it was ages ago. But Zakia remembers it like it was yesterday. No SIT can make Ehsan Jafri's murder and memory fade away. The closure report must come with a grain of truth, at least. Zakia says the SIT made it wishy-washy. The SIT gave clean chits in February 2012 to Modi and 63 others. Why? "No prosecutable evidence," said SIT. Modi became Prime Minister of India in 2014!*

of these answered, the SIT filed closure reports. And Narendra Modi got his clean chit.

Zakia's hunt for justice has been on for nearly 20 years. In the meanwhile seasons changed, the world got warmer, the Paris Accord was signed; Donald Trump came and went and Modi became PM, not once but twice. Ehsan Jafri was one of 68 killed in Gulberg Society of Ahmedabad on February 28, 2002.

It now seems like it was ages ago. But Zakia remembers it like it was yesterday. No SIT can make Ehsan Jafri's murder and memory fade away. The closure report must come with a grain of truth, at least. Zakia says the SIT made it wishy-washy. The SIT gave clean chits in February 2012 to Modi and 63 others. Why? "No prosecutable evidence," said SIT. Modi became Prime

go if none of the courts loc into the issue? The republic stands or falls based on what the Court does... This republic is too great to loo the other way."

Sibal spoke on November 10, 2021 and then on November 11. He spoke on why the SIT cannot just give a clean chit and scot it. It chose to ignore evidence. The army wasn't called when it should have been called. There was a massive police failure. The culprit i somebody else, the charge is o somebody else.

Kapil Sibal spoke of Article 21. He said the investigation needs to find the footprints. And, then the court retired for lunch! But the court had earlier in October made it clear that the wouldn't be any more adjournments. This was it, the last and final hearing! SI beware. Will the top court oblige? (IPA Service)

country's economy has been contracting and it may lead to acute poverty. As funding from different sources has been cut off, the country is faced with flagging economy.

In this context, how emergency aid could be distributed in a proper way without emboldening the Taliban is a challenging question. As the Taliban government consists of radical factions, funds given to Afghanistan may be misused. Considering that the Taliban are notorious for violation of human rights, the aid may not be distributed fairly. Furthermore, gender segregation has deprived women of their rights.

Given that the Taliban are not concerned about the pathetic condition of the country's citizens, the international community must engage with the government out of humanitarian considerations and try to solve the poverty the country faces.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Via email

#### DRDA with ADCs

Editor,  
The central government has recently announced that the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) will now be placed at the disposal of the District Councils.

The DRDA is a specialized and a professional agency capable for managing the anti-poverty programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development on the one hand and to coordinate the overall effort of poverty eradication on the other. In other words, while the DRDA will continue to watch over and ensure effective utilization of the funds intended for anti-poverty programmes, it will need to develop a far greater understanding of the processes necessary for poverty alleviation/eradication. It will also need to develop the capacity to build synergies among different agencies involved for the most effective results. It will therefore need to develop distinctive capabilities rather than perform tasks that are legitimately in the domain of the grassroots Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) or the line departments. The role of the DRDA will therefore be different from that of other agencies including the Zilla Parishad.

DRDAs are expected to interact effectively with various agencies and to coordinate with the line department, the Panchayati Raj Institutions, the banks and other financial institutions to access resources required for poverty reduction efforts in the district. In short, they have to be able to coordinate and bring about a convergence of approach

among different agencies for poverty alleviation. Earlier the DRDAs were coordinating with the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) without infringing into their domain. In effect the DRDA are not direct implementing agencies but support systems. Real implementation will now be the District Councils which will do that through the Village Development Councils; in other words, the Dorbar Shnong which are not democratically elected bodies and which also do not have the machinery and resources for project implementation and which have also not been examples of accountability. The District Councils have themselves not been very upfront about their own accounting procedures.

The only impact of the DRDAs coming under the purview of the Councils is that they will closely monitor project implementation and get periodic reports through frequent field visits. The purpose of the visit would be to facilitate the implementing agencies in improving implementation process, besides ensuring that the quality of implementation of programmes is high. This means that DRDAs will ensure that the intended beneficiaries receive the benefits under the different programmes especially those earmarked for certain target groups (SC/ST, women and

disabled).

In addition the DRDAs are to coordinate and oversee the conduct of the BPL Census and such other surveys that are required from time to time and also carry out action research/ or evaluation studies that are initiated by the Central/State Governments.

The DRDAs are meant to deal only with the anti-poverty programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development. If DRDAs are to be entrusted with programmes of other ministries or those of the State Governments, it should be ensured that these are focussed on anti-poverty programmes.

If the DRDA is to be tasked with any other programme by the Councils it will have to be done with the approval of the Secretary, Rural Development of the respective State who will then consult the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. In such cases, adequate staff should be provided. The challenge for the DRDA in Meghalaya will be to set the accountability benchmarks for the Councils and Dorbar Shnong.

Yours etc.,  
R. Kharkongor,  
Via email

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

*"The smallest seed of faith is better than the largest fruit of happiness."*

— Henry David Thoreau

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.93 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2021

### Rule of law subverted in Meghalaya

ON November 11, 2021 the State Bank of India had opened its doors as usual. The State Government had declared a holiday on that day on account of Shad Nongkrem but banks are governed by the Negotiable Instruments Act (NI Act) and have to follow those scheduled holidays only. But no sooner than the banks started functioning when some pressure group activists entered the premises and ordered the banks to down their shutters. The banks complied because all institutions in Meghalaya are used to obeying two sets of laws — those enacted by the State and arbitrary orders issued by pressure groups. Interestingly, the police instead of upholding the rule of law told the banks to comply with the pressure group's orders lest it turns into a law and order issue. This sort of abrogation of the rule of law at the behest of pressure groups has become par for the course in Meghalaya. The Government and its law and order machinery looks the other way. Indirectly therefore, the actions of the pressure groups are being legitimized and they use that clout to assert their muscle power in other economic spaces.

It is ironic that the banks from Meghalaya have not taken this issue seriously enough to discuss it with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) which is the regulatory authority for banking institutions in India. Banks serve a customer base and like Gandhi said the customer is king. Banks exist and bankers earn their salaries from their depositors. Bank employees are not paid by the Government or by the pressure groups whose diktat they benignly obey. Banks are constantly on the lookout for customers because without deposits they would not be able to survive. It is unbelievable that the banks would supinely agree to bring their shutters down merely because a group of activists flexed their muscles and told them to do so. Does this happen in any other state? Why have a police force at all when the rule of law is subverted every day? The Shad Nongkrem is a festival specific to Hima Nongkrem. There are similar dances in the other Himas too so should the banks be ordered to down their shutters for all these festivals? If there are bank employees that are connected to the Shad Nongkrem they should be allowed to avail leave under Restricted Holidays. But this habit of flouting the NI Act at the drop of a hat and capitulating to the demands of pressure groups is eroding the rule of law which is the basis for the survival of democracy in this state. This week banks are closed for four whole days? Will they make up for the losses incurred?

The present concern with equal right to inheritance of property by sons and daughters, as well as with the right of women to participate in the dorbar in the Khasi society prompted me to write this article. Though I had written several times on these issues, but it seems that the serious thoughts presented in newspaper articles and academic writings are only worthy of hearty appreciations, but they do not sink into the minds of policy-makers. However, since in my understanding, making policies or enacting laws concerning with issues relating to the culture of a society cannot be done without proper understanding of the fundamentals of the culture, I feel the need to reiterate some of these important fundamental elements of the Khasi culture. Though drastic changes have taken place in Khasi society, the fundamental cultural norms still control the thought processes of the people and dictate to their minds to either rightly or wrongly support, or oppose, any conscious and planned efforts to introduce changes in traditions and customs in spite of all odds.

The first thing to understand in depth is the nature of the Kur (clan). In the past, the Khasi society comprised numerous clans which were economically and religiously independent, but socially and politically interwoven in social interactions. So, each Khasi clan was a basic member of society, a basic political unit, an independent religious denomination, and an independent economy. The individuals played whatever roles they are entitled to, within the bounds of the above institutional identities of the clans. Within one political community in the form of the Raid or the Hima, each of these clans was an institution with common seal and perpetual succession.

In the original Khasi tradition, the basic unit of the clan comprised of the family of a woman and her children, with supporting, caring and protecting maternal uncles. Hence, in the strictest sense, the father's physical presence or absence had little to do with the cultural legitimacy, legality, honour, security and social interactions of the family. The ultimate authority in the society rested not with men, but with women in the status of mothers, sisters or nieces. For a man to be accepted as an active member in the political community, he had to produce his conceptual document of continuity and permanency in the physical presence of his mother, sister or niece, who embodied "ka sad ka sunon" (foundation of perpetual succession of the clan). Without the physical

# Women and Dorbar in Khasi Society Today

By Fabian Lyngdoh

presence and the moral and spiritual backup of female clan members, the Khasi society took no cognizance of the men however intelligent, wise or rich they might be. If a man had no surviving female clan members, then he no longer had any role, rites, rituals or ceremony to perform in the Khasi society other than being a servant of some other clans.

As an independent economy, every clan was materially and morally responsible for the economic and social security of its members within one political community. Since the clan was an ever-living social institution with common seal and perpetual succession, there was no point in time when it ceased to exist and its properties could be inherited by any individual as private possession to the exclusion of other clan members. What was succeeded (not inherited) was only the position, the right to enjoy, and the responsibility to manage, and contribute to the growth of the economy. So, ownership of clan properties can be succeeded only by persons in the context of a clan, and not inherited by persons as individuals.

The participation of women in the political affairs of the community was restricted. I had written about this in previous articles, but I repeat them here for the sake of clarity. The basic political institution among the Khasis had been the dorbar-kur (clan council) where males and females can participate. Indeed, a clan council in which no female clan member was present, would be invalid. In the clan council, all interests of the clan, especially that of the women were thoroughly discussed, and the resolutions adopted were presented in the state dorbar by the chief maternal uncle or Basan who was the chief political representative of the clan. Once the resolutions were adopted in the clan council, all other maternal uncles were bound to stand with one voice through the mouth of their Basan. So, in Khasi tradition, not all the men who attended the dorbar had the democratic right to express their personal opinions other than supporting the arguments of their respective Basans. If the maternal uncles of the same clan were to conflict and challenge each other in a public dorbar, they would all be defeated in their cause as a clan, or ridiculed and sent back home to reassemble their clan council and resolve their differences privately. It has often been asserted, that only male adults are entitled to participate in a Khasi dorbar. But the actual principle

was, 'only male adults who represent the clan, and on behalf of the womenfolk are entitled to participate in the dorbar'. A Khasi man has no right to participate in a traditional dorbar if he has no female clan members to advocate for. So, in the real sense, it was not that women were prohibited to attend the public dorbar, but it was felt unnecessary for them to do so as they were already represented by their male members as advocates. There was no sacred religious ground for which Khasi men attend the dorbar other than these socio-cultural functions.

The elders who conducted the dorbar always invoked the presence of the community deities and the spirits of their political ancestors. A Khasi state dorbar in which the community deities and spirits of political ancestors were not invoked to be present, would be invalid. Therefore, the Khasi traditional dorbar where men and spirits are mingled in a charged atmosphere was considered a male affair which no man would like his sisters or nieces to be exposed to. So, the prohibition of women's participation in public dorbar was in the sense of protecting them from occult exposure that could be harmful, and also from socially embarrassing situations that might be entailed in public affairs.

The act of attending a Khasi traditional dorbar was not considered as a democratic right, but it was actually a socially imposed responsibility on the male adults. That is why even today, fines are imposed on male adults for not attending the dorbar shnong. Hence, the restriction on women was understood not in the context of infringement of rights, but in the context of not compelling them to attend and participate in the public dorbar.

The above cultural principles could have been sociologically legitimate in the past; but today, it is evident that they are no longer relevant and legitimate. Today, when the nuclear families had replaced the clans as the new basic social institutions in political affairs, in religion, in social membership and in economy, the clans lost their institutional identities, and their role in the dorbar became insignificant. As each individual becomes a full-fledged member of society apart from the clan, the present-day dorbar shnong is no longer based on clan representation, but open to all individual adult male residents of the village or locality. According to tradition, a man was not authorized to represent himself, or to represent his wife and

children in the Khasi dorbar. But today, men do not attend the dorbar shnong on behalf of their female clan members, but on behalf of their wives and children and for their own personal interests, which is against the tradition. The idea of protecting women from occult exposure no longer holds any ground as no community deities or spirits of political ancestors are being invoked in any dorbar. In today's context the act of participating in the political affairs of the community is understood as a democratic right of the individuals, and not a compulsion on the adult males only. So, the idea of not compelling women to attend a village dorbar is no longer relevant in the modern context, but it has become an infringement of their rights. As things stand today, there is no longer any cultural ground to say that women's participation in the dorbar is against the Khasi sacred tradition.

Moreover, a precondition for the right of any clan to be involved in the administration of the political community was that it should be a permanent resident institution, and hold title to land within the community; and men had participated in the dorbar precisely on the ground of being representatives of the clans that were the permanent resident landholders. But today, individuals have become independent land and property holders apart from the clans; and women, especially in the rural areas, have more title of ownership to land and other properties than men. That is evident from the recent movements for men empowerment, and equal right of property inheritance to the sons. Take any Khasi village as a model of study, and it would reveal that the majority of the fathers are "ki shongkha" (incoming husbands) from other villages or localities, while the majority of the mothers are daughters of the soil. Majority of the men own floating sources of income such as labour and services, while the majority of women own lands in the village and businesses based on land. Husbands would migrate to other places in case of divorce and remarriage, but women, as permanent residents, would always remain in the village even after divorce or remarriage. Therefore, as permanent residents and individual landowners in the village, women today have greater rights than men to be involved in the village administration on the ground of Khasi tradition itself. So, the move of the Mawlai Town Dorbar for providing more space for women in the dorbar shnong and community administration, is culturally relevant and rationally justified.

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## Impact of Glasgow Likely to be 'Net Zero'

By TP Sreenivasan

Net Zero carbon is the new mantra of the climate action plan, which emerged in Glasgow. This means that the impact of greenhouse gas emissions in future should be neutralised by suitable measures, which include widening of sinks and technological sequestration of carbon from the atmosphere. But since the pledges made for reaching net zero are conditional, the total impact of Glasgow may also end up as 'net zero'.

The global climate action plan moved from 1.0 (Rio) to 2.0 (Paris) to 3.0 in Glasgow. The world has changed beyond recognition, the actors are new and urgency for action is evident. The benchmark of keeping global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels has emerged as the survival threshold of the world. But we have not moved an inch away from catastrophe, even with the raining of uncoordinated pledges of various kinds from developed and developing countries. The best expectation of the International Energy Agency is that warming could be limited to 1.8 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2100, if all COP 26 commitments made are fulfilled on time. The big 'if' remains and anything above 1.5 degrees will not save the planet. Its fate will be the same, however marginal the increase in temperature may be above the desirable level.

After the Rio consensus of 1992, the sliding began soon after in New York and I literally witnessed the losing battle of the developing countries for climate justice. It came slowly, but came out openly in COP 1 (1995) in Berlin, where I was a Vice Chairman of the COP and the spokesperson of G 77, truncated by the dissent of oil exporting countries, which did not want any cut in consumption of fossil fuels and small island states, which wanted priority for adaptation. At the end of the Berlin meeting, we barely managed to maintain the right of developing countries to develop on the basis of common but differentiated responsibilities.

A young and inexperienced German Environment Minister, Angela Merkel was absolutely keen that her debut as President should not fail to reach a compromise and worked individually with the key delegations to find the bottom line of each. My bottom line on behalf of G-77 was "no mandatory cuts of emissions for the developing countries" and she ensured it and found a formula for the historic Berlin Mandate, which won her the first feather in her international cap and rest is history for her. But the point to remember is that the issues of COP 1 still remain and the spirit of Rio has been only receding.

The Copenhagen compromise, which led to the Paris Agreement because of the collapse of the Kyoto Protocol was reluctantly accepted by the developing world, as it included measurable reductions, though made voluntarily. But the Climate action plan 3.0 ushered in at Glasgow sets unrealistic years for net emission. Those years will remain mere targets when the sinks will become inadequate to absorb the emissions. The recent Conference of Parties to the Biodiversity Convention has not adopted any significant measures to expand the carbon sinks like the forests, lakes and rivers. What the Glasgow action plan will do is to eliminate the differentiation between developed and developing countries, which we had maintained at COP 1 and beyond, till the collapse of the Kyoto Protocol.

India has received much praise for the climate targets it announced at Glasgow, but they are contingent on receiving adequate and enabling finance from developed countries, as elaborated by our Environment Ministry. Prime Minister had mentioned the failure of the developed countries to fulfil their financial commitments under the Paris Agreement and had demanded that they make available US\$ 1 trillion

at the earliest. "Our targets for 2030, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced during his speech in Glasgow, are all contingent on the availability of this money. This will be reflected in the updated NDC (Nationally Determined Contributions) that will be submitted soon," said the Indian Minister. This is exactly the position we outlined at COP 1, namely, we will do everything possible within our resources for climate, but the polluters must pay if rapid action is necessary.

PM Modi had announced that an emission intensity (or emission per unit of GDP) reduction target — 33 to 35 per cent by 2030 over 2005 levels — was raised to 45 per cent, while another target for increasing the share of renewable energy in India's installed electricity capacity by the year 2030 was enhanced to 50 per cent from the existing 40 per cent.

Twenty countries have announced that they will end financing for fossil fuel projects abroad in a deal. Several countries had already agreed to end international financing for coal, but this agreement is the first of its kind. The strength of the agreement will depend on how many countries ultimately sign up to it, and whether it can get some of the world's biggest fossil fuel financier nations on board.

As for coal, India has been transparent and China and the US also did not sign on to the agreement on transition from coal to clean energy. The commitments take the total number of signatories to 46, and includes some big coal users, including Indonesia, Ukraine and South Korea. The targets fall short of what experts, including the IEA, say is required to achieve net-zero by 2050. Net-zero emissions can be achieved if countries reduce current greenhouse gas emissions and also remove some of what is already in the atmosphere, so that the net addition is zero.

In addition to promising to limit warming, governments from wealthy nations in the 2015 Paris Accord reaffirmed their commitment to contribute \$100 billion a year to poorer nations to move away from fossil fuel and adapt to climate change-fuelled disasters. But the developed nations have not met their pledge, even though the requirement has grown. Since funds promised at Paris have not materialised, the demand for equity and global solidarity on financing is fully justified.

PM Modi had not revealed that he would announce a net zero target year and the compromise of G-20 of middle of the century would be the COP 26 COP formulation also. While the 2070 net zero target may have disappointed many in Glasgow, Together with his other pledges, he made a clear impression of reasonableness and transparency. His conditionalities remained dormant. The impression at home was that India had "clearly put the ball in the court of the developed world." "This is real climate action. Now India demands \$1tn (£722bn) in climate finance as soon as possible and will monitor not just climate action but also climate finance," said an Indian spokesperson. India appeared serious about dealing with climate change without making any financial commitment beyond its reach.

Activist, Greta Thunberg called the deliberations in Rome and Glasgow a lot of blah blah. There's no guarantee that the planet will be saved, but the ring of sincerity to seek solutions individually even if the collective effort did not work out, was a new feature in COP 26. But, for those of us, who were at COP 1, it was Déjà vu, because the many ghosts that we fought in Berlin under the guidance of Angela Merkel, like inequity, inadequate technology and financing and the general sense of impending disaster remained unvanquished in Glasgow.

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### Letters to the Editor

#### Abbreviations are deceptive

Editor,  
In 1984 the gas plant in Bhopal which manufactured methyl Isocyanate exploded in the middle of the night. Warren Anderson, the CEO of UCIL, the company involved, managed to escape by air to another country. Around 1500 people lost their lives with thousands suffering bodily defects. Until last month, the widows assembled to protest over non-payment of their pension and unpaid compensation.  
In 1986 the then Union Govt framed an act known as Environment Protection Act. The Act was meant to dissuade industries that pollute the environment. This is vital for sustaining life by way of the clean air we breathe and water we drink. Our Dalits, Adivasis, STs and SC - the forest dwellers - still live with fear of being evicted by corporates in charge of mining and deforestation. Subsequently, the Union Ministry for Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) was established.  
Sadly, the abbreviations in bold letters point to the

contrary in Meghalaya. So too our Motor Vehicles Act. In 1966, I was coming from Jowai on a state bus, then run by the Assam State Transport. It was already dark as the bus awaited the opening of the gate at Alu-godown (now Madanring). The traffic police told the driver to alight so the vehicle could be inspected as it had to go through Shillong city. After inspecting the vehicle, the policeman handed a slip to the driver. Being in the front seat, I was able to read the writing on that slip. It tells the mechanics of the State Transport Department that one right hand side, rear back light was not working. This till date remains a fond remembrance of the strict automobile checking to save precious lives. Today drivers can get past all faults by paying the policemen on duty.

Looking at what goes on right before our eyes, is very sad indeed. Worse is the power assigned to the so-called mobile courts, the moment we attained statehood. This court, far from emulating our traffic police at Madanring, is more interested in heavy fines. Marketeers had to leave their vehicles and

walk many miles as they were overloaded. Time and again our MLAs trying to help poor villagers or office goers or school children have voiced this in the assembly. Their arguments were that the population of bus to car ratio was 10,000 to 1 and there's no respite from this.

We will also never have Motor Vehicle Inspectors (MVIs), of the likes of two fine gentlemen of Jaiaw and Nongthymmai. As a result we had drivers who tried to save lives and were strictly under the scanner of these MVIs. Today the DTO office is swarming with middlemen even after digitalisation. The MV Acts are never followed. Use of improper windshields and air horns etc., were pointed out in previous letters to the editor. But more needs to be highlighted to save lives. And this is on JCBs.

Twelve years or so ago, a car on its way to Shillong with occupants comprising a family including a grandmother was smashed by a speeding JCB at Kliehriat. All including the grandma died on the spot. The horrible accident was never investigated. How JCBs are allowed to ply on public roads remains a mystery. But look-

ing at the persons who mans this Department whether at the centre or state, one can understand where the rot lies. We never use common sense in understanding definitions. What is a bumper? A bumper is a horizontal metallic bar fixed at the rear and the front, to cushion the impact in case of collision so as to minimise death or injury. They should be soft and yielding and positioned as close to the ground as is permissible to prevent head injuries as far as practicable. The JCB does not have a bumper. Instead, it has a 9 tonne horizontal blade at its front, protruding one metre each on the right and left, thereby stealing the public road. It's rear has a vertical woodpecker like 5 ton steel, swaying dangerously sideways. It is used to drill/blast holes on rocks.

The JCB does not pay Road Tax. It is also exempted from pollution checks. Why so? The answer is this: JCBs have to be transported to their workplace on carriers (12or 16 wheelers). Not only that; these carriers should have loading and unloading platforms. Why? Because while loading or unloading, the weight of this machine would lift the front of the

truck. And when levelled, the heavy engine of the carrier would crash with a heavy thud and the springs may snap. So too while unloading. On one occasion, I tried to shout at children playing football on the ground where the JCB (not rubber tyre but steel chains) was being unloaded. The children never bothered to listen. Its childhood DNA.

Many don't understand that the operator is not a driver, for the JCB in real terms is nothing but an earth mover. The operator may possess a driver's licence for light or heavy motor vehicle but he/she cannot drive the JCB back home to report to the owner to please them. It has to stay put in its workplace.

On lighting, JCBs have no conventional lights which are vital for safety at night. The bright headlights on the rear shines bright on the driver of the car behind, blinding him/her. There's no provision for dip or dim - a necessity not to cause a glare on incoming traffic. Any unlucky person could ram into this 25 ton solid steel and that would mean instant death to all inside the vehicle.

It's very unfortunate that in India these JCBs mingle with the vehicles on public roads. Why are the personnel of the Transport Department meant to look after the safety of precious human lives, especially those that have paid road taxes, ignoring this danger? Interestingly, most of the JCBs in India belong to ministers. And some of them belong to those at their beck and call before elections. Covid appears to have derailed the 2022 National Games hence many JCBs are at present hibernating in the burrows. Yes a few could still be seen racing with BMWs on rumble strips. Only the heavy jerks prevent them from winning the Grand Prix. Some have their hoe and drill broken and are convescing in welding workshops in town.

I may sound like a school teacher talking to kindergarden kids, explaining all the details of safety that are not worshipped in our country. Let us hope that one day we will see a new dawn when lives are counted as precious which is what every life should be.

Yours etc.,  
J. Kharmih  
Shillong - 1

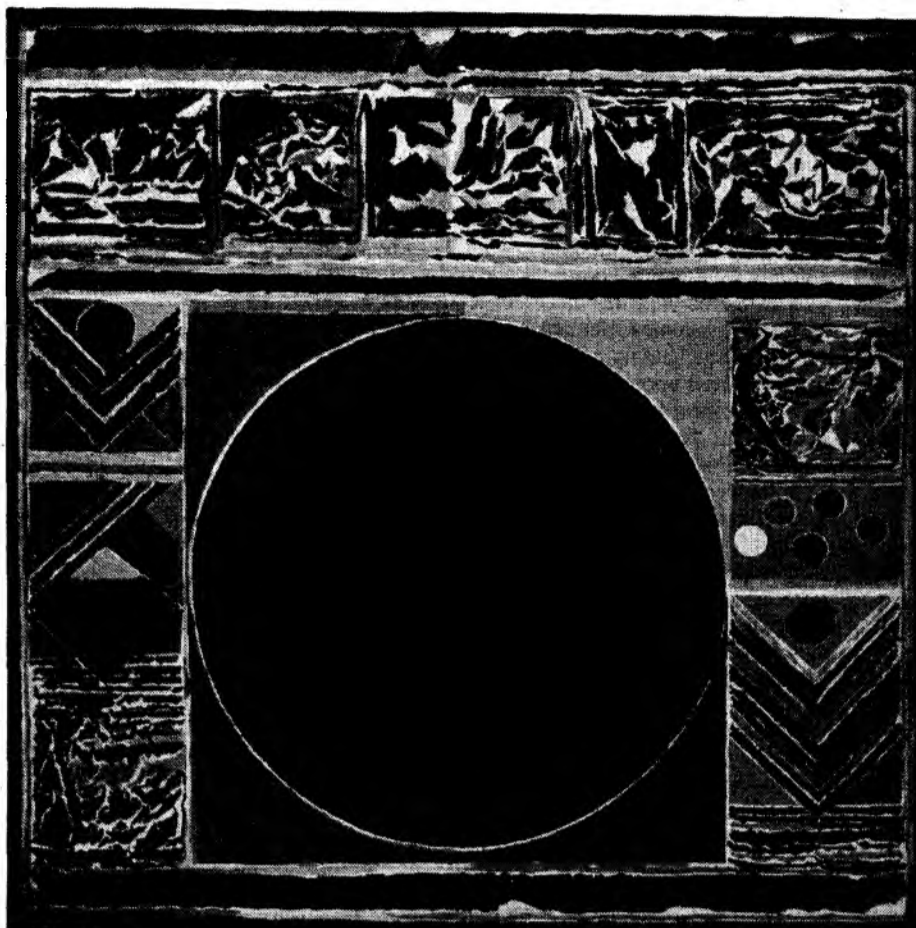
# An Auction of Classics by Indian Modernists

AstaGuru's upcoming Modern Indian Art - 'Collectors Choice' online auction will present bidders with an extraordinary opportunity to acquire numerous masterpieces and rare compositions. While works by the members of the Progressive Artists Group remain highly sought after, collectors are looking to diversify their collections with significant works by other celebrated names across the spectrum of Modern Indian art can find rare picks in the upcoming auction. All lots presented during the auction are offered without a reserve. Bidding for all artworks will commence at INR 20,000.

The auction will include a broad range of 160 exceptional lots by eminent names in the modern Indian landscape such as Amrita Sher-Gil, M F Husain, F N Souza, Ram Kumar, V S Gaitonde, S H Raza, Krishen Khanna, Sakti Burman, Jehangir Sabavala, Anjolie Ela Menon, G R Santosh, Biren De, T Vaikuntam, Ganesh Pyne, KG Subramanyan, Nasreen Mohamedi, Sunil Das, K K Hebbur, Bikash Bhattacharjee, and many more.

Commenting on the auction, Sneha Gautam, Vice President-Client Relations, AstaGuru, said, "AstaGuru's 'Collectors Choice' segment has quickly developed into one of the most anticipated auctions in our annual auction calendar, with each sale receiving an overwhelming response from collectors. The format has allowed us to present a broader perspective of Indian modernism by offering works across varied price points and ones that have been part of noteworthy collections. The auction offers several rare gems stretching the gamut of Indian modernism from M F Husain's - Homage to C V Raman - an abstract series celebrating the renowned Indian physicist, to Anjolie Ela Menon's inimitable take on Pieta - a subject touched upon by artists over centuries. The auction also features sculptures from leading artists including Somnath Hore, Prodosh Das Gupta and P V Janakiram."

Leading the sale is lot 156, S H Raza's, Bindu, acrylic on canvas work from 1982, an image that has become highly synonymous with modern Indian art. Over his illustrious career, Raza experimented with several modernist styles, however, he is best known for his celebrated Bindu series. Estimated between INR 80 lakhs - 1 crore (US\$ 111,111 - 138,889), the presented lot has related connotations in Indian philosophy of being the point of all creation;



the source of space, cosmos, time and consciousness. Raza developed and created numerous masterpieces with the motif of the Bindu being the central theme of the composition, and today these extraordinary works have become pivotal acquisitions in some of the most important art collections in India and across the world.

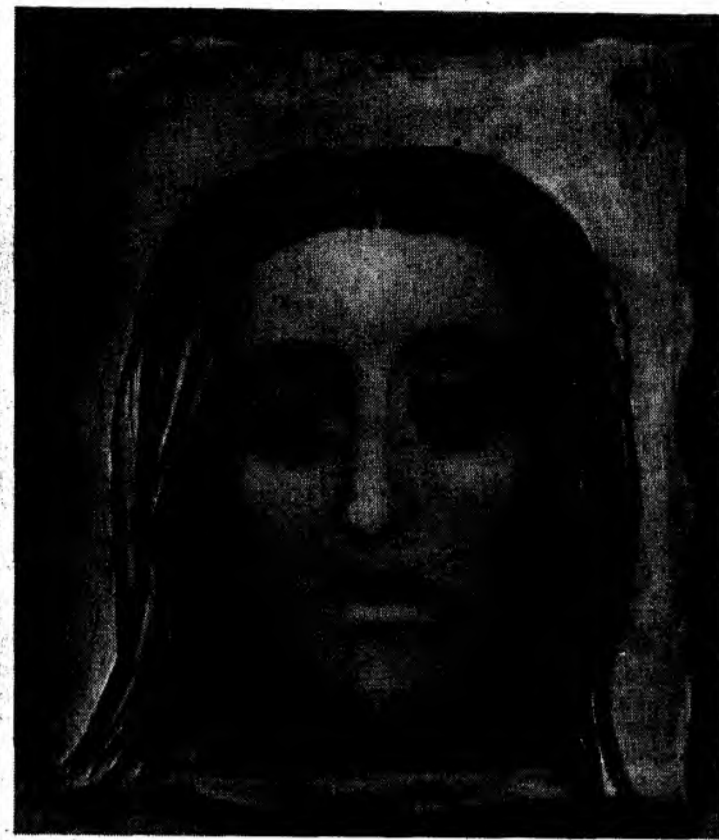
The auction includes several key works by one of India's most celebrated and prolific colourists, M F Husain. The exceptional works that are part of this curation offer bidders a comprehensive view of the mastery of the artist, and his insatiable desire to dabble with a range of styles, techniques, and themes. Lot 148, Family, acrylic on canvas, larger than life portrait of a family by Husain. What makes this artwork extremely rare, is the fact that the artist has included himself in the composition. The catalogue also documents an image of the artist next to the unfinished piece while he was still working on it. Estimated at INR 80 lakhs - 1 crore (US\$ 111,111 - 138,889), this rare lot would make for a very fine acquisition for followers of the artist.

Another important work is lot 160, a set of two abstract works titled 'Homage to C V Raman', circa 1987, estimated between INR 10 - 15 lakhs (US\$ 13,889 -

20,833). In these unique canvases, Husain takes a detour from the figurative paintings he is known for, and pays homage to Indian physicist C V Raman, known for his groundbreaking work in the field of Physics, with 'the Raman effect', and the first Asian to win the prestigious Nobel prize in the field of science. These rare works showcase a different side of the artist who was always addressing the matters of the world through his art.

The auction also features an Untitled, 1987, nude portrait of a woman (lot 136) by F N Souza, estimated at INR 30 - 40 lakhs (US\$ 41,667 - 55,556). Unlike many of his portraits and head paintings, which are heavily composed of his unrestrained and graphic style, in the presented lot Souza captures the beauty of the female form with utmost grace and subtlety. The auction also includes an early Untitled, nude work by the artist from 1950, estimated at INR 6 - 8 lakhs (US\$ 8,333 - 11,111). In the current lot (lot 58), Souza's treatment of the female body is influenced by his study of ancient Indian culture and sculptures yet the face of the subject takes on more of a European influence.

Anjolie Ela Menon, Pieta, 1996, oil on masonite board, will be offered in the auction with an



estimate of INR 40 - 50 lakhs (US\$ 55,556 - 69,444). In this extraordinary work (lot 121), Menon captures the moment when Jesus was taken down from the cross but instead of mother Mary, she shows him resting in Mother Teresa's arms. She deftly captures the two subjects in her distinct figurative style and transforms a theme that has been recreated by artists over the centuries.

A tempera on canvas work by Ganesh Pyne from 2004 titled 'The Gardener' will be auctioned

with an estimate of INR 40 - 50 lakhs (US\$ 55,556 - 69,444). This highly detailed work (lot 72) features a bust atop a raised platform made of bricks placed in front of a large tree. The artwork is executed in Pyne's distinct style, where he draws from his personal experiences of solitude and pain that he endured early on in his childhood. His works lend an exceptional quality to them in terms of overall execution and line work, and always have an over looming sense of darkness

and death. The artist's works have become highly sought-after at auctions with works witnessing growing demand with each sale.

Lot 66, KG Subramanyan, Untitled, circa 1960, is a rare large-scale work for the artist which has been executed with oil on a cloth and differs from his characteristic style. In a vibrant synthesis of the modern and the traditional, Subramanyan's works were inspired by varied sources including indigenous Bengali artistic traditions, Indian tribal art, folk symbolism as well as elements of European modernism such as cubism. Drawing from the rich resources of personal memories and mythical fables, the artists depicted women, children, objects and animals in a theatrical play of vibrant colours which gave his canvases a sense of magical realism. The present lot is estimated at INR 20 - 30 lakhs (US\$ 27,778 - 41,667).

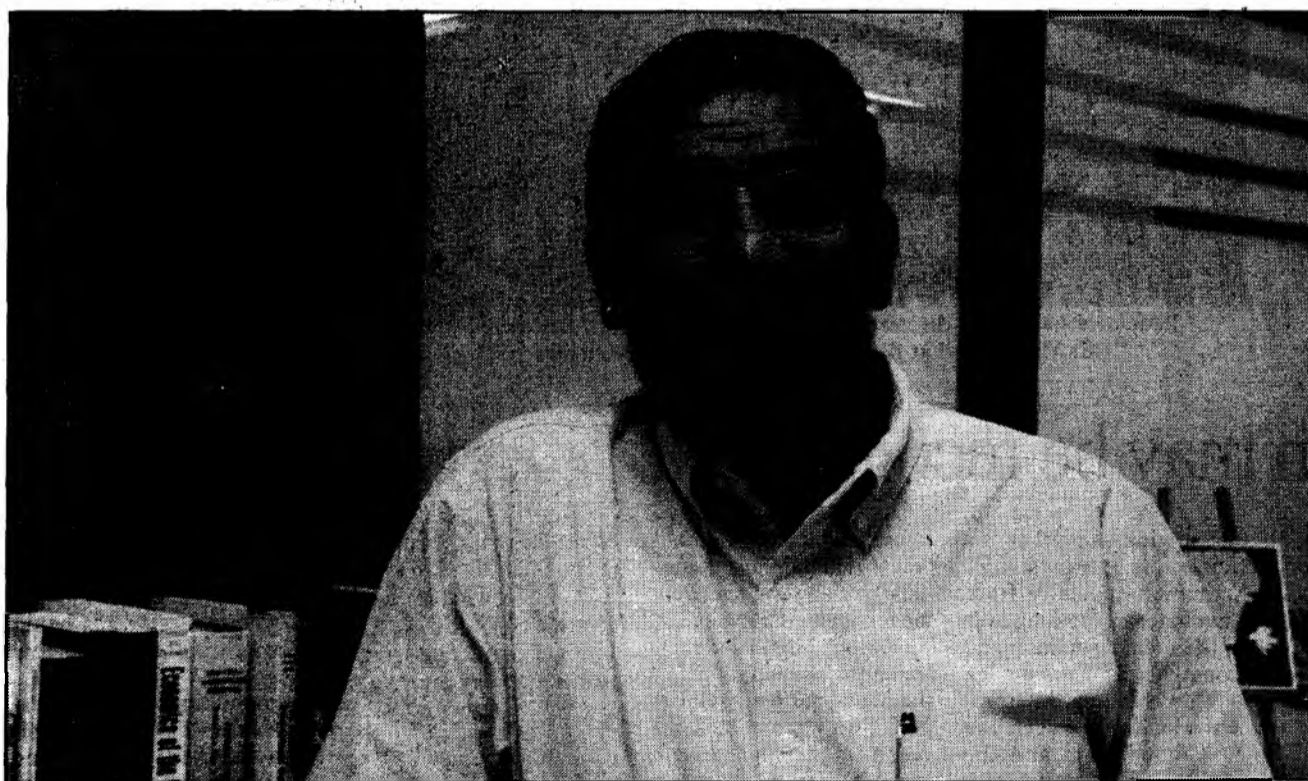
Lot 48, Manjit Bawa, Untitled (Man), circa 1980, will be offered in the auction at an estimate of INR 40 - 60 lakhs (US\$ 55,556 - 83,333). This exemplary work, executed in Manjit Bawa's signature style, features a play on colour tones, the subject and the background are in sync with each other. Another important attribute of the work is its single figure composition. Another imperative work in the auction is J Swaminathan's seminal Untitled, oil on canvas from circa 1960, estimated at INR 10 - 15 lakhs (US\$ 13,889 - 20,833). This extraordinary work has been part of several important exhibitions and has also been published.

The auction also features several key works originally from the collection of Davida & Chester Herwitz, who were important patrons of Indian art and were supportive of the modern movement in India at its very conception. Important works from the collection by artists including M F Husain, Shamshad Husain, K Laxma Goud, and Sohan Qadri will feature in the auction.

The auction further includes an impressive selection of sculptures by leading names in the modern Indian landscape including Prodosh Das Gupta, P V Janakiram, Himmat Shah, Sadanand Bakre, Satish Gujral, Somnath Hore, K Laxma Goud, Krishen Khanna, Ram Kumar, and many more.

The Modern Indian Art - Collectors Choice auction, will take place online on 20 - 21 November 2021, and the entire auction catalogue can be viewed on AstaGuru's website, [www.astaguru.com](http://www.astaguru.com). (IANS/ife)

## 'There is urgent need to flood the world with positive energy'



By Vishnu Makhijani

What we hear from the news, social media and other media forums are events of disasters, conflicts, wars and violence. These events can have negative psychological impacts on us. Why not celebrate the good that is being done across the world?

We hardly hear of the good except when there are special events or while we are celebrating special days. Why don't we get doses of these good deeds at the same rate that we get news of disasters? This urgent need to flood the world with 'positive' energy led to the '#KindnessMatters', a co-publication of UNESCO MGIEP (Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Education for Peace and Sustainable Development) and Penguin Random House, says the Institute's Director, Anantha Duraiappah, on its release on World Kindness Day (November 13).

"The book presents 50 small but heroic and impactful acts of kindness from around the world. The

idea of presenting these transformative stories is to inspire many more people (young and old) globally, to practice kindness in their everyday lives towards developing more peaceful and sustainable homes, classrooms, workplaces, communities, and the world," Duraiappah told IANS in an interview.

The book, he said, has been inspired by UNESCO MGIEP's global #KindnessMatters campaign launched in 2018 -- to collect stories of young people carrying out acts of kindness to create a positive culture of compassion. "So far, we have collected over one million acts of kindness -- focused on K3 -- kindness for self, kindness for others and kindness for nature," he added.

Detailing the process of selecting the 50 stories in the book, he said a small team from UNESCO MGIEP and Penguin conducted reviews, surveys, and reached out to thousands of individuals and hundreds of kindness organisations worldwide to submit inspirational stories.

"A simple selection criteria was established based

on scale, duration, or impact and diversity. Eventually, we arrived at 50 inspiring, and impactful stories, which are just a tip of the kindness iceberg," Duraiappah explained.

A common thread runs through these stories, of "the selfless, compassionate and impactful acts of kindness that people have carried out for self, for others or for nature, again, in line with the underlying theme of the #KindnessMatters K3 campaign. The book brings out such stories of human interest that are a testament to the positive and sustainable change people are able to create", he elaborated.

What prompted the observance of World Kindness Day and what has been the experience so far -- particularly during the pandemic? How can the concept be taken forward in the 'new normal' of the post pandemic world?

World Kindness Day on 13 November was established in 1998 by the World Kindness Movement and is now celebrated by hundreds of thousands of individuals and organisations worldwide.

This year, UNESCO MGIEP is supporting the World Kindness Day by highlighting transformative actions and events of people and organisations through a dedicated website.

"In the past year and a half, we have experienced devastation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Many have lost loved ones or been separated from them during the pandemic. Even in its aftermath, the pandemic will leave a lasting effect that will take years to recover. However, we have also received an outpouring of kindness and heartening actions/stories of people supporting each other to overcome the challenges that humanity faces.

"What we find is that during these tough times, kindness is the binding force that connects us and will continue to do so as we grapple with many more such global issues," Duraiappah said.

Noting that the quest to create ripple effects of kindness globally is backed by science and evidence, he added: "Neuro-scientific studies have shown that altruistic, kind behaviour engages brain networks associated with reward processes. We hope to capitalize on this fundamental biological need to build a new way to drive global positive change irrespective of the context we find ourselves in. I would encourage everyone to be a part of the kindness force."

**HOW DID UNESCO MGIEP COME ABOUT?**

"In 2009, the UNESCO General Conference decided to set up an institute focused on education for peace and sustainable development in the vast and rapidly growing Asia-Pacific region. The Institute was launched in 2012 and initially a two-member team operated out of the UNESCO office in New Delhi. Over time, the team has expanded to over 35 members and works out of its independent albeit temporary office in central Delhi," Duraiappah said.

UNESCO MGIEP focuses on achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 towards education for building peaceful and sustainable societies across the world by developing programmes and products that promote social and emotional learning, innovate digital pedagogies and empower the youth, he said.

UNESCO MGIEP's Social Emotional Learning (SEL) interventions draw on the science of learning and the aim to build intellectual and emotional intelligence among learners through innovative pedagogies, Duraiappah concluded.

# The publishers who made Shakespeare a global phenomenon

Walk into any decent bookshop today in search of Shakespeare's plays and you're sure to find at least one. And even if you can't find what you're looking for on the bookshelves, there is always the internet, where a great variety of different complete works and editions are also available – almost all of them free of charge. This, however, has not always been the case. In fact, in Shakespeare's time, the texts were rather hard to find. The incredible access we have now to Shakespeare's work is thanks to a handful of enterprising publishers who saw the earning potential of making the bard's texts readily available to read.

The first publisher to take a chance on the plays was Thomas Millington in the late 1500s. Millington was a small-scale operator who specialised in throwaway popular texts about murders and monsters and whose business was tucked away in an obscure corner of London. Millington issued editions of Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus and of the second and third parts of the trilogy of plays that he wrote about King Henry VI. Despite the out-of-the-way location of his shop, Millington's editions sold well and his success encouraged others to take a punt on some of the other plays.

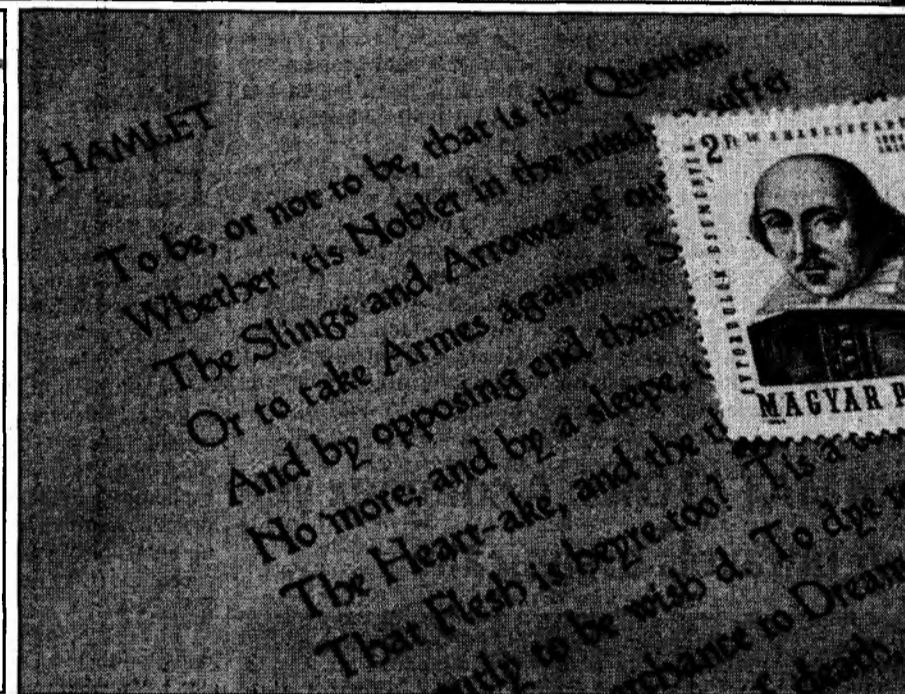
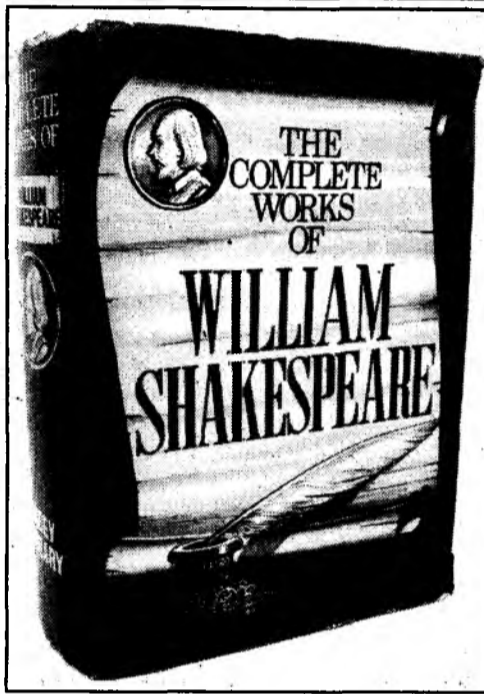
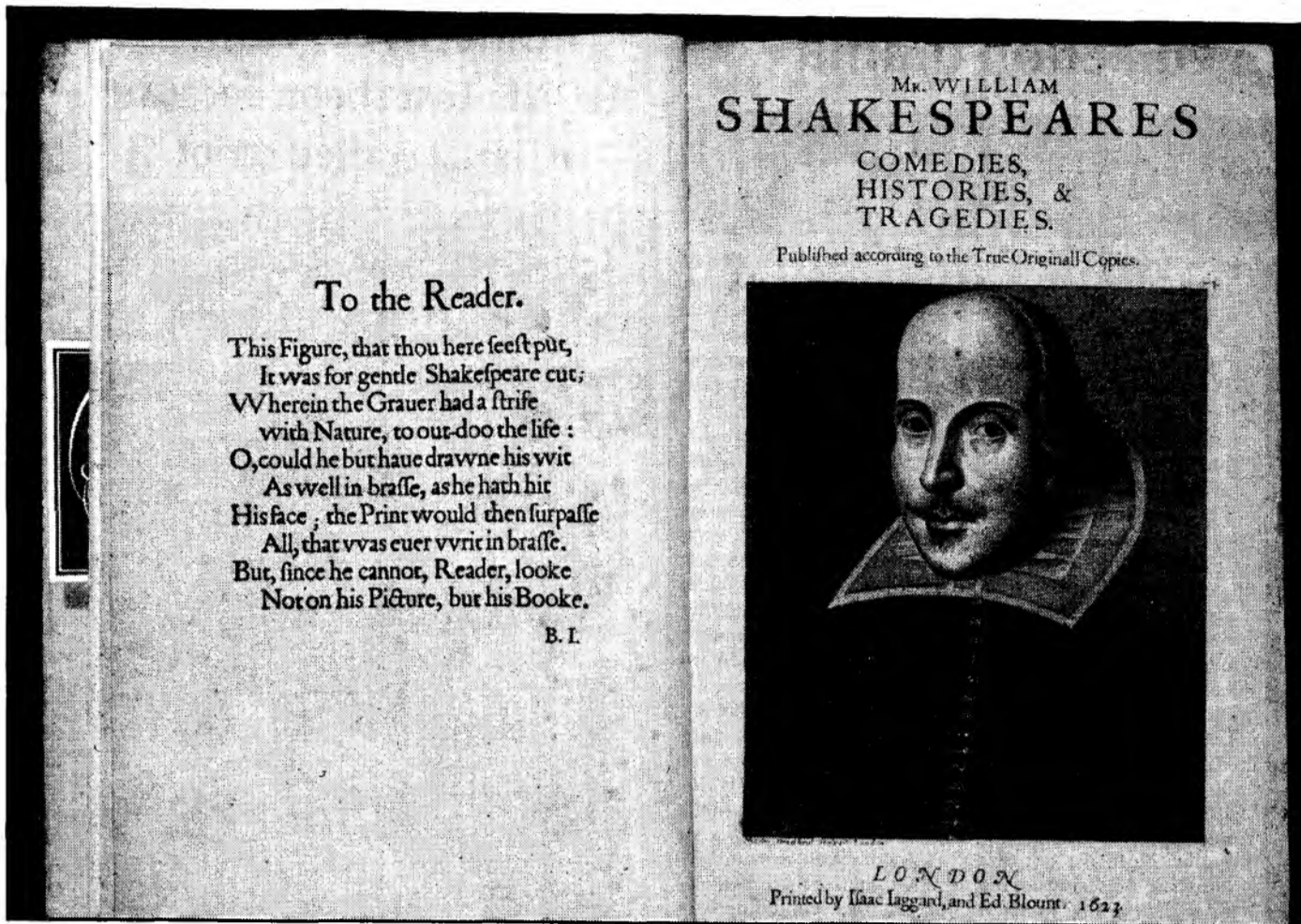
## SHAKESPEARE BECOMES EXPENSIVE – THEN CHEAP

By 1623 – seven years after Shakespeare's death – sales had been good enough for almost all of the plays to be published together in a collected edition – a volume conventionally known as the "First Folio" (folios were the largest-sized books). But this edition was very expensive, costing about £1 – the equivalent of almost nine days' wages for a skilled craftsman. It was thus a luxury item that only the wealthy could afford. And it set the pattern that was followed for many decades, with Shakespeare's plays remaining largely confined to an elite readership who had the funds to buy expensive editions.

The first person to try to break this pattern and open up access to Shakespeare was Robert Walker (circa 1709-61).

Walker had a lot in common with Millington in that he mostly published cheap, disposable, sensationalist texts. He also had a sideline in quack medicines, as he manufactured and sold "Daffy's Elixir", a concoction advertised as an effective cure for almost all known diseases.

In the mid-1730s, Walker waged a price war with the London publishing establishment, driving the cost of individual play editions down to just one penny each. This led to a significant expansion of Shakespeare's readership and, consequently, to a much



greater demand for performances of Shakespeare's plays in the 18th-century theatre.

## SHAKESPEARE FOR ALL

In the following century, another out-of-the-way publisher, John Dicks, followed Walker's example and lowered the price of access to Shakespeare even further.

Dicks came, himself, from a very humble background and was determined to make great literature available to the poorest sectors of British society. In the 1860s, he issued Shakespeare's plays individually at the rate of two plays for a penny – half of Walker's price more than a century previously.

Dicks then collected all of the plays into a single, paperback volume which he offered for sale for just 12 pennies, the equivalent of less than a third of a penny per play – far and away the cheapest price ever for a complete Shakespeare. Dicks estimated that he sold almost a million copies of this book, making it the most successful Shakespeare edition that had ever been published.

Dicks can be said to have done more to popularise Shakespeare than any other publisher. But even his achievement has been surpassed in our own time. The key figure today is, again, a rather obscure figure: a computer programmer called Grady Ward, who created a digital edition of the plays in 1993. Ward made his files freely available to others and they became the basis for a wide range of free-to-access Shakespeare websites and apps. The chances are that if you've ever looked at a Shakespeare play online, you will have been looking at some version of Ward's original files.

We have seen that John Dicks sold nearly a million copies of his shilling edition of Shakespeare. Figuring out how many people have made use of Ward's text is a little harder. A possible guide may be the number of users of just one version of it: Eric Johnson's Open Source Shakespeare. Between 2006 and 2020 this site attracted just short of 19 million distinct users. Given this level of traffic on just one site, it does not seem unreasonable to speculate that the combined number of users for all the various sites and apps may well be approaching 100 million.

In our own time, Shakespeare is a global phenomenon, freely available to tens of millions of people around the world, either in print form or online. But we should never forget the debt we owe to those obscure figures who have helped to popularise his work over the centuries – the Millingtons, Walkers, Dickses and Wards – those unsung heroes who have helped so much to make Shakespeare what he is today.

(The Conversation)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, NOV 14, 2021

Moon trine Sun on your solar return chart and it will give amazing results. You will be successful in getting a job of your choice. Your business too will make progress in the right direction. You will get peace of mind. Contact with new people will fetch you great results. Your marriage can also get fixed to a person of your liking. There will be much fanfare about some festival or function. You will bargain for something valuable. You will also develop professional contacts. You will also earn good money. Your desires will get fulfilled. You will also re-unite with some of your old friends. The mood of the students will be good. They will get success in their efforts. You will desire to learn something new. You will also go for new research or project. Those who are students will get admission in institutes/courses of their choice.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It is going to be a happy week for you. You will get opportunities to rise in your life. Your boss and senior officers will be happy with your work. Someone in the family will earn lot of wealth for you. You will also get good response in your business. You will also get promoted in your job. You will also get increment, bonus and salary hike. At the same time, you will be handed over some important responsibilities and duties at your work. Your colleagues will be impressed by your work and capabilities. You will also manage to keep your partner happy. Lovemates will enjoy wonderful bonding and will get closer to each other. You will also enjoy marital bliss. You need to remain alert and not show any carelessness in any matter. Also keep a watch on your associates. You also cannot afford to take your health for granted and must keep doing exercises and yoga to keep yourself fit.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

A wonderful week awaits you ahead. You will be enjoying a favorable phase in your life. You will never be short of funds and money will keep coming. Your enemies will also not be able to stand before you. You will also bring a good name for your family. Your efforts and hard work will give you good results. But the pressure of work will be too much. But you will manage it well. You will remain busy and will not be able to give time to your family. Your partner will not be happy with it. You need to balance the things and need to look at your family affairs too. There can be a discussions or argument in your family. But you will avoid it. A family function will also take place. You will be pleased and happy in the company of your friends.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This is the time period which will bring lot of relief for you from the troubles that have been haunting you for some time. Your financial status and work condition will improve. There will be rise in your fortunes. Your business will bring lot of gains and profits. Even in your job things will get better. You will be able to win the trust and confidence of your boss and colleagues. You will be busy in financial matters and also invest your money wisely. You will be successful in all your efforts to get money. You will also spend quality time with your spouse/partner. You will also get success in love matters. The relations with your brother and family will be better. You will remain in good mood. You will also participate in a family function. You will also receive good news from somewhere.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Some of your decisions may go wrong. But you need not worry much. Just stay away from arguments and fights. You will make progress in your job. Honesty, dedication, passion for work and truthfulness will be your plus point. You will walk on the path of success due to your intelligence and patience. But avoid being straightforward. Your bosses will listen to your views and also encourage you. Even your colleagues will cooperate with you. You will have financial gains in your work/business. Don't put your money in risky ventures. There will be good understanding between husband and wives. Do not lose your patience and discipline in certain matters. Those who are in politics/media will do well. You will also go on a fun trip with your family.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Your official matters will be solved with ease. Suddenly your name and fame will rise. You will become very popular amongst your colleagues. Those who are in business in partnership or association will get gains and profits. Your financial status will be stable. Your enemies and opponents will be active but unable to harm you. You will get lot of success in matters like job, business and investments. You will be full of energy and excitement. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your mate. The husband and wife will understand the needs, feelings and aspirations of each other well. You will also meet an inspirational or influential person. He/she will help you to rise in your work. You can fall in love with someone special. You will be successful in your love relations. Your decisions will prove to be correct.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You will plan to buy a new vehicle or property. You will also purchase costly items for household needs. You will also get involved in new romantic relations with a person working in your office. You may also be knowing this person before. It will be a very warm and fulfilling affair

leading to marriage. You will also have financial gains. Money and wealth will keep coming. A person whom you trust may betray you. Even with your intelligence and cleverness, your results will be messed up. You will just remain alert and cautious. Your bosses and elders will shower their blessings on you. You will remain popular. You will have a more disciplined perspective than before in your business/work. Asset related disputes will be solved in the presence of someone.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

It will be a very fruitful week. You will have lot of gains. You will also put extra efforts in your new task. It will bring rich dividends. You will put your best efforts to complete your work. A business problem will get sorted out with ease. You will win trust and confidence of your colleagues, associates and bosses. You need to be practical and stop dreaming. You will also receive help from your friends and supporters. Stay away from controversies. You will come closer to your spouse/partner and will share emotional bonding with him/her. You will also have lot of love for your family members. Your brothers/sisters will give you lot of respect. Students will get positive results. Being close to experienced people will prove to be extremely helpful and beneficial. Your love life will be fantastic. You will remain positive and in high spirits.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

All good things will happen to you this week. The star of your destiny will once again shine and your struck tasks will gather momentum. Income will rise. You will have gains from investments you made in the past. New job/business offers too will come. Your work will be appreciated so your self-confidence will increase. You will get success in love and romance. You will also get blessings of your elders. Your faith in god will help you in overcoming all problems. Your wife/husband will prove to be a source of strength. New contacts will be made in your business or job. You will not waste your time on useless things. You will implement new strategy and because of which you will meet an influential person. And get success too.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

Maybe you will feel nostalgic this week. You will remember your good old days and friends. You will come closer to your family and your sweet tone will impress one and all. Your colleagues will also seek inspiration from you. You will remain favorite of your bosses. Your financial condition will remain stable. You will also share warm relations with your spouse/partner. Those seeking a new partner will get marriage proposal. Peaceful atmosphere will be formed in your house and workplace. You will get success in exams. Your court related cases will be solved with ease. Troubles of your friends and acquaintances will get finished now. You will also meet people having same understanding. You will remain in perfect health.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

This is a success granting week from all angles. You will make progress in your job/business. Even your romantic life is going to be amazing. You will share wonderful bonding with your partner. You will get success in love matters. Your business will grow substantially and you will get good profits. Your work planning will take you towards success. The week will fetch you great rewards. There will be an increase in your work potential. There is scope for promotion in your job. You will also go for some investments and saving etc. You will also have a loving behavior towards your family members. They will also love and support you a lot. You will feel satisfied overall. You will get good rewards for your efforts.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

This is a favorable time period for you. You will move ahead on the path to success. You will also have financial gains. Your growth in business is going to be good. You will put your best efforts realizing your dreams and you will get positive results for it. Good news will come from somewhere. Time will be peaceful. You will also travel with your family on a travel destination for fun and relaxation. You will plan well before doing any work. You will get success in property deals. Time will be spent wonderfully. There will be too much of fun and merriment. Do not lend money to anyone. You will be successful in finding a solution to several problems with your intelligence and wisdom.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

All your planned works will be completed. Government related works will take place. You will be busy in your official/business affairs. There will be some obstacles created by your enemies in your tasks but they will not get success. Your loved one will support you a lot. You will share nice relations with your spouse/partner. Your health will be perfect. Your efforts will fetch you great rewards. There will be an increase in your work potential. You will get promoted. There is scope for growth in your business. You will go for some investment and saving etc. You will carry out your duties perfectly. You will be ready to accept any kind of challenge. You will be busy in your work. You will also move forward with lot of self confidence.

# A MESSAGE ON CLIMATE CRISIS

India's highest literary award winner has sent out a strong message on the impending climate catastrophe at a special ceremony here as part of the 40th Sharjah International Book Fair (SIBF).

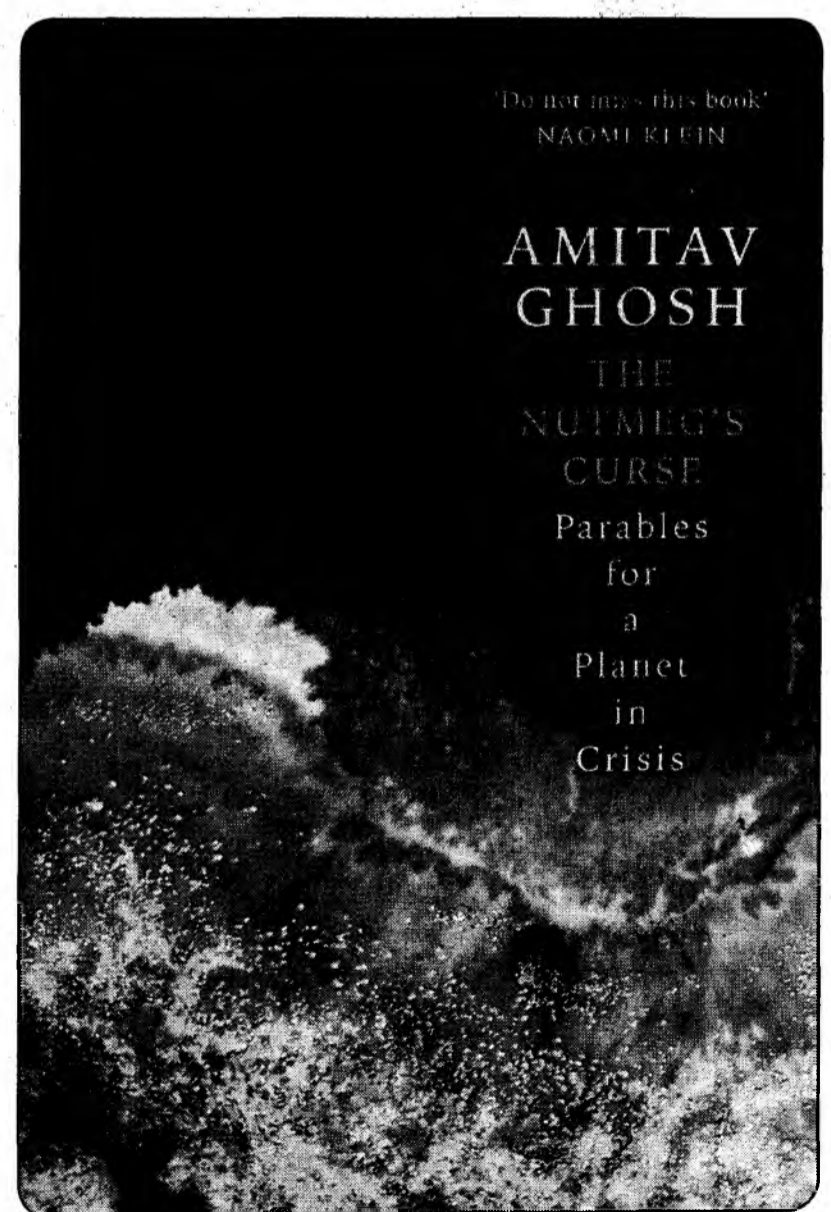
Taking a swipe at the COP26 climate talks that ended the same day in Glasgow, Amitav Ghosh said on Friday that enough hasn't come out of the summit that had some of the world's top leaders attending it.

"More needs to be done at a global level with sea levels rising and aquifers drying up," he said while explaining how his latest book "The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis" was inspired by the people of Banda islands in Indonesia and through it how he found that the origins of contemporary climate crisis lay in 'Western colonialism's violent exploitation of human life and the natural environment.

The book, published only last month, has been called a successor to The Great Derangement where the 2018 Jnanpith winner first wrote about climate change and its impacts.

"I had to address questions (on climate change) I encountered and saw first-hand closer home," said Ghosh while talking about how he first wrote on the topic, moved by the situation in the Sunderbans in his native West Bengal -- a mangrove area in the delta formed by the confluence of three rivers where rising sea levels were "gobbling up islands" in front of his eyes.

"Nutmeg and Mace are endemic to the Banda islands thanks to their fertile volcanic soil. Because of the nutmeg tree, Banda became the centre of the world and the Bandanese very prosperous until the European colonialists entered, plundered and left," said the winner of Padma Shri, one of India's highest honours, and author of best-sellers such as "The Calcutta Chromosome" (1995), "The Glass Palace" (2000) and "Gun Island" (2019).



Talking about the central theme of his book, he said, it explores 'the nutmeg's curse' of how an abundance of a natural reserve (spice trees) led to the elimination of their very preservers (Bandanese).

"The planetary crisis is exactly the same. It's a resource curse. It's exactly what's happened with fossil fuel in places in Iraq and Libya in recent history," he said while explaining how the dynamics of

climate change today are rooted in a centuries-old geopolitical order constructed by Western colonialism.

"The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis" has been described as a powerful work of history, essay, testimony, and polemic that traces our contemporary planetary crisis back to the discovery of the New World and the sea route to the Indian Ocean. (IANS)

"Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 95 SHILLONG, MONDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2021

### Militancy, Maoists

THE nation signalled two serious internal threats this weekend. One came from Manipur, where militants ambushed security forces in Churachandpur district near the Myanmar border, killing an Assam Rifles Colonel, his family and four soldiers. In Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, 26 Maoists were shot down and several policemen injured in an encounter with a task force of the state police. Notably, the insurgency in the North-East was on low-key in recent times; so were the Maoist-Naxalite offensives. Put together, fresh question marks have been raised on internal security. While Congress leader Rahul Gandhi pointed an accusing finger at the Modi government for these grim incidents, it should be noted merely as a perception of the national opposition. Overall, the NDA government has been able to keep internal security under control. Terrorist attacks from the Pakistani-inspired pro-Kashmiri militant groups are now limited to Jammu and Kashmir, unlike during the UPA regime when the worst of it was witnessed in Mumbai and elsewhere too. Yet, the message from Gadchiroli and Manipur are that there can be no let-up in maintaining internal security even as there are vulnerabilities in multiple fronts and worse scenarios could emerge unless those in charge of both internal and external security are on high alert. Insurgency in the North-East has a separatist angle to it and this is unacceptable. Genuine issues and grievances of different groups who perceive to be deprived of good governance needs to be addressed and a sense of belongingness strengthened among the local population. The fight against insurgency can only be won with the people's support.

Maoists claim to uphold the cause of the poor, the deprived, the desperate tribals and Dalits who continue to remain destitute. Beyond the cacophony and rhetoric of reaching out to the Dalits and tribals very little was done for them in the past about 75 years of Independence. Prime Minister Modi never tires of claiming he is the godfather for India's poor, but the promises are often hollow. A prerequisite to the welfare of the common man is a high rate of economic growth. But other than the rich, who made more money even during Covid times through governmental patronage and raised their financial status to higher levels, growth for the common man remains stunted. This is bound to encourage Maoists to draw in more volunteers into their ranks. Militancy is no way to solve problems, as challenging the state's might is more difficult now because of the sophisticated arsenal that is at its command. At the same time, it is incumbent on governments to address the problems of India's poor and make them the real stakeholders in governance through a participatory system of decision-making.

# Meghalaya experiencing midlife crisis of sorts

By H H Mohrmen

The state is all set to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary next year and the Chief Minister has announced that the Government has invited the Prime Minister to be the chief guest on the occasion. The Government is also expected to organize a host of programmes to celebrate the grand occasion, but some incidents which occurred in the last few weeks raise one very important question and that is - Is Meghalaya at fifty experiencing a midlife crisis of sorts?

### What's in the name?

The birth of the twelfth district of the state was welcomed by many, but it was the name of the district which has drawn unnecessary attention and criticism. This column has in the past written about the people's penchant for giving their children English names which are sometimes funny. And much to the embarrassment of the individual, there were cases where a person was even named toilet. Similarly, the name of the new district draws more attention than the new district itself. It has become the subject of ridicule and social media platforms are abuzz with memes and jokes about the name of the district. It is now obvious that the Khasi Pnar people not only have the propensity to come up with embarrassingly funny names for their kids but they are capable of giving funny names to the district too. People raised many questions with regards to the naming the blocks, the district or even the state. Some asked why should a district always be named according to its geographical location as East, West, North or South? What can't it be any name at all?

### Can't leave them ministers alone

In the entire embarrassing situation one meme that did the rounds in the different social media platforms says, 'We don't need a minister for education; we need education for ministers.' The geographical misnomer which came out of naming the twelfth district of the state has indeed given a clarion call that this Government should consider providing education to its ministers. Otherwise, how else would a cabinet minister in the present government brag about his own academic failure? One of the cabinet ministers in the MDA government has in the last bye-election made it public that he had appeared

for his Class 12 examination several times but failed every time he appeared. The question that parents ask is - what message does the minister want to communicate to the youths of the state? The most important question is, can such a person be a role model for our children?

Higher education in the state has once again failed because in making important decisions, the minister is considering only his constituency's interest. Considering that in West Jaintia hills two

Shnong yet he maintained a mute silent on the fact that a woman can be a Chief Secretary of the state, a Deputy Commissioner of a District, a judge in the court, Editor of a newspaper or even a minister in the state government. It defies logic that the same people who cannot accept a woman to be the headman of the village, said nothing about women occupying high ranking offices in the government or the court. The question is - what is it about Dorbar Shnong that it is con-



new 'so called' public colleges one in Nongtalang and another in Shnong were recently institutionalized [p] by the government yet, there were more than one hundred students in the district who failed to get college admission in Jowai. What is the purpose of providing funds to these colleges from the government treasury when they can't even cater to the needs of the students in the district? The government did not plan this carefully hence the pressure groups in the district have to protest so that the students get their college admission. Every decision that this Government makes is not properly thought out but was made to please some of their constituents only. The famous Pink Floyd song says, 'we don't need no education... they teacher leave the kids alone,' our children do need education but it is them ministers that we can't leave alone.

### The dilemma called matrilineal system and women's empowerment

The people of the state in general and the Executive Committee of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council in particular are in a dilemma when it comes to women's issues. The Chief Executive Member of the KHADC stated that the council cannot accept the idea of women becoming the Headman or even taking part in the Dorbar

considered to be so sacrosanct that it is beyond the reach of half of the population of the state?

The Dorbar Shnong were praised as traditional institutions, but is that even true? The real tradition is that village administration in the past went hand in hand with the running of the traditional religion. Villages were governed by the Raid which was represented by the maternal uncles of the major clans in the area and it was headed by the Lyngdoh who is also the priest of the village (Mohrmen 2021). Till very recently many villages in the Jaintia hills followed this tradition and it is also the reason that till date the headman in some villages can only be from a certain clan. Therefore, blaming tradition for the male chauvinistic attitude towards women in the society is unfounded and for that matter even the term 'raid/raij' and 'dorbar/durbar' are borrowed from our neighbours.

### The Council mandate and gender discrimination

The Council which is being mandated by the Constitution to protect and promote tribal culture and customary practices has instead started doing away with the tradition one after the other. The bill which is related to family property which was introduced in the house recently,

not only contradicts the tradition it is supposed to protect but it is not even required in the first place. The question is how many families in the district have enough property to distribute to all their children? What is the population of the district which are well off and have enough wealth and property to distribute to all their children? Isn't it true that much of the population in the state lives in a hand to mouth existence? What is the point of tabling the bill when much of the state's population is landless in the first place? Isn't this a case of wasting public time and the Council's meagre resources?

The same Executive Committee in the same bill targeted women who enter into inter-race marriage and bars them from inheriting family property, yet maintains a mute silence on men who married women from another community. In spite of the bill's thrust on equal distribution of wealth to both male and female children of the family, it is silent on males who marry outside the community. Only females were discriminated against in the bill. Why this double standard where there is one rule for male population of the society and another for the female? Isn't this a clear case of gender bias perpetrated by this Council? Gender discrimination is obviously prevalent in the country's only matrilineal state and it looks like the males of the community are fighting hard to protect the last bastion of male dominance.

It is now obvious that in the event of its attaining fifty years of existence, it is not just the state which is experiencing midlife crisis but the institutions like the ADC and even the general population are in a dilemma. The KHADC is in a state of utter confusion where on one hand it is trying to protect tradition and on the other it is dismantling the time-tested tradition which people have been practicing since time immemorial. In the process it discriminates against the fairer sex. Time will come when people will lobby for doing away with the matrilineal family system that people follow now and in such eventuality the members of the KHADC will ask if there are any more traditions to protect and promote. However, the larger question for the people then to ask is, if the ADCs are even relevant today.

Hhmohrmen67@gmail.com

## Modi-Shah duo altar anti-incumbency factor

By Harihar Swarup

Judging by its huge defeat in West Bengal and its 50 per cent strike rate in the recent national by-elections, the BJP's prospects for next year's assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur appear a little shaky. But at the BJP's recent national executive, Prime Minister Narendra Modi exuded confidence that the party will continue to be in a commanding position. He pointed out that the BJP has an army of committed cadres, while other parties revolve around just one family. (It is another matter that today, the BJP and the government revolve entirely around Modi.) More than Modi's speech, it was the unguarded remark of Prashant Kishor, Mamata Banerjee's campaign handler, which provided the reality check to those who assume that Narendra Modi's days are numbered because of bad governance, ugly efforts at communal polarisation, a disturbing disregard for democratic norms and blatant manipulation of constitutional bodies and investigative agencies to settle scores with opponents.

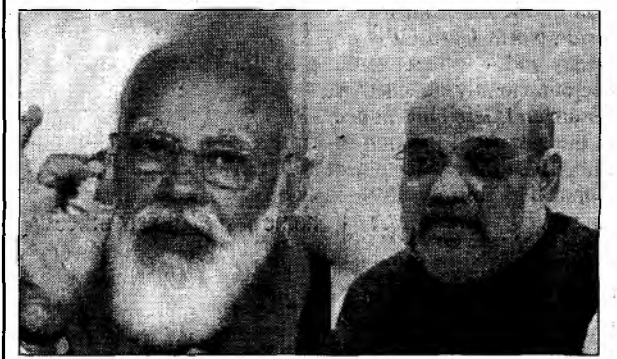
Kishor's assessment that the BJP will remain at the centre of Indian politics and will not go anywhere for the next many decades was a candid analysis by a seasoned and successful pollster, who is now in the rival camp. His comments were made in the context of Rahul Gandhi's blithe assumption that it is

inforce the perception that the family today is unqualified to lead the Congress. Incidentally, the Grand Old Party was not founded by the Gandhis' ancestors as most of our younger generation assume, but by stalwarts of the freedom movement such as Allan Octavian Hume and Dadabhai Naoroji.

During her confrontation with the UP police after the recent farmers' tragedy in Lakhimpur Kheri, Priyanka Gandhi's s feisty, theatrical spirit dominated the news cycle for a few days. But are such well-publicised histrionics and expressions of sympathy for the downtrodden, a defining characteristic of her legendary grandmother Indira Gandhi, enough to save the Congress today?

Priyanka has complete charge of the Congress's UP wing, but with little remaining of the party organisation at the grassroots, it makes better sense to join forces with other opposition parties, most notably the Samajwadi Party, rather than sniping at them.

Far from responding to the growing rumbles in the party led by the G-23 letter writers at the CWC meet last month, the Gandhis assumed they could cock a snook at the legitimate demand for a full-time president. Rahul Gandhi made clear that he would formally take over the reins of the party only at a time of his choosing. Meanwhile, the drift in the party



just a matter of time before the voters throw out Modi. In the past, swings for and against a political party were a recurring phenomenon in bi-polar contests, since anti-incumbency was a major factor in voter trends. Kishor comprehends what Rahul still fails to grasp. Modi, ably assisted by Amit Shah, has radically altered the rules of the game in India's politics. The laidback gentlemanly Westminster style of government, the model at the time of Independence, has virtually withered away. The BJP is not a party that springs to life only during the poll season. It is a ruthless, full-time election machine, crushing those who stand in its way and uprooting all dissent, even within its own ranks. Political considerations contribute to most important government decisions. And if the government has messed up in demonetisation or managing the coronavirus pandemic, it has compensated by delivering on a number of schemes of individual benefit to the average Indian voter, whether building millions of toilets or providing running water.

True, the BJP may lose in some of the forthcoming state assembly polls, but the party's focus is mainly on Uttar Pradesh. The BJP will leave no stone unturned to ensure that it retains control of India's largest state, even if this entails elevating the status of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, no favourite of BJP's master strategist Shah, and about whom even Modi has reservations, for not displaying the subservience expected from model BJP CMs.

The ruling party has yet another trump card. Rahul Gandhi may be the BJP's favourite whipping boy when it comes to lampooning the opposition, but he is also one of Modi's biggest assets. The BJP believes that with the Gandhis as the main opposition, Modi is assured a comfortable run. Recent events in Punjab, where the Gandhis totally misjudged the maverick Navjot Singh Sidhu and unnecessarily humiliated an old warhorse like Amarinder Singh, re-

continues. His mother Sonia Gandhi remains notional interim president though her health does not permit her to play an active role. Rahul may wax eloquent on the Modi government flouting the Constitution and democratic norms, but he has been equally cavalier in respecting his own party's constitution. Internal party elections have not been held since 1998. Unlike Sonia, Rahul does not bother to consult experienced party elders. Driven by whimsical likes and dislikes, he is cocooned from getting genuine feedback. For instance, unilaterally inducting leftist radicals like Kanhaiya Kumar and Jignesh Mevani did not go down well with the party old-timers who feel overlooked for political lightweights and are uncomfortable with a centrist ideology's lurch towards the radical left. The rapid attrition in the Congress illustrates the level of disillusionment.

It is not just genuine Congresspersons who are getting restless, even the Opposition appears frustrated. They do not see Rahul as a credible alternative to a campaign-savvy Modi in the 2024 general elections. Banerjee has already started extending the TMC's geographical boundaries by successfully wooing discontented Congresspersons in Goa, Tripura and Meghalaya. Sharad Pawar's NCP is similarly on an expansion drive at the expense of the Congress. And the AAP keeps nibbling at the Congress's vote share. A split in the Congress in some form is inevitable in the near future, with the Gandhis' refusal to relinquish their position as the chief challenger to the Modi behemoth. Rahul does not seem to comprehend that by refusing to step aside and renounce the claim to the post of PM-in-waiting, he may be doing a grave disservice to the cause. The Gandhis could be the roadblock to the emergence of a viable alternative to the ruling party. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Unscrupulous allotment of MBBS seats

Editor,  
A few days ago, the NEET results were declared and like every year it is expected that a few meritorious students will become eligible for the government allotted MBBS seats. Of the 29 states of the country, 28 of them base the seat allotment purely on the marks. So the applicants choose their seat of choice according to their ranks (aka counselling). However, it is astonishing to see that our state does not follow this rule notified by the Central Government but rather follows a "Random Approach" to seat allotment wherein the Government randomly allots colleges to students without holding "Counselling Sessions." When asked for the reason for this approach the DHS said, "This is done so that no student feels discriminated based on their marks".

It is my observation that students who have political connections are more likely to get into TOP MEDICAL COLLEGES like LHMC, MAMC, VMMC, JIPMER etc., while those with no political back-up have no chance of making it to top medical colleges. On the contrary these students usually end up in low-ranking colleges irrespective of their NEET ranking in the state. It

is painful to see that despite it happening so blatantly none of the NGOs or pressure groups raise a voice in this matter. My theory is that since this issue only affects a few medical aspirants so it won't be of any advantage to the pressure groups etc., to raise this issue at the proper forum. Let me remind the readers that in a few years these will be the same people that will make up the State's Health Care system and public indifference to these issues will cost the state and its people a lot in the future.

If this injustice isn't enough, the MBBS students do not even get the stipends which they are supposed to get every year even though ours is the lowest per capita amongst the North Eastern states. By the time the medical students get their first stipend they are usually in their 3rd or final year which serves no purpose as some of these students belong to low socio-economic backgrounds and end up having to avail student loans in order to buy books which is around Rs 12000-15000/yr and also to meet their college expenditure.

I urge the unaware parents and the public to become conscious of what has been going on and hope that the government especially the new Health Minister brings some changes to this extremely CORRUPT SYSTEM perpetrated by the Health Department all this while.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

#### Make Trinity a role model to save the environment

Editor,  
To be great one need not belong to a well-to-do family or have a great upbringing. This has been substantially proven by Padma Shri awardee Trinity Saioo of Mulihe village, Jaintia Hills, "Turmeric Trinity awarded Padma Shri" (ST, 9 Nov). The honour she has brought to this state now has made all of us proud. People have now realised that her works and efforts have drawn the attention of people from outside the state too. The government should capitalize on this to the maximum. It is incredible that a schoolteacher with six kids could achieve what Trinity had done and brought to use successfully. This certainly puts others more learned than her to shame.

Her relentless struggle and diligence in the farming of the Lakadong turmeric even inspired this writer. One believes, she is an inspiration not just to the farmers but to the entire urban population. I strongly feel that the outstanding innovation and achievements of Trinity should be incorporated as lessons in the school textbook. This is my sincere request to the academic board of Meghalaya. We have taught

our children enough of science and technology. This has only contributed to raising the temperature of this planet. In this dangerous situation of climate change, we must put the brakes on the proliferation of hard technology and shift towards farming and agriculture. Trinity will be the best source of inspiration.

We must make constant efforts to inculcate in the young the importance of living near NATURE as well. Yes, we should catch them young. The time has come to think for the new generation and ensure that our future offsprings will get safe air to breathe and sufficient water to drink. Let Trinity Saioo be the role model for our children/youths, as a celebrity figure -- like Greta Thunberg.

Farming will not let us down as done by smoke-emitting technology. Many environmental scientists have warned of devastating consequences if we do not stop abusing this planet with mechanical tools. We must adapt to living far from the madding crowd of brute technology. Humanity survives and remains healthy by eating turmeric, not gadgets.

Yours etc.,  
Salih Gewali,  
Shillong

#### Festivals of noise and muscle!

Editor,  
Do the festivals of India

get conducted out of "devotion" to the Almighty or do these "holy" occasions function as a deadly instrument to display crude muscular/religious clout and influence to "show who is the boss"? Innumerable houses/residential complexes host patients, senior citizens and infants. Yet far from displaying minimum concern to their vulnerability, microphones and drums blared until the dead of night coupled with ear-shattering crackers in the guise of "performing Chhath! There was no respite in the early hours of dawn too! People admitted in hospitals are also facing the same predicament with the torture increasing at cancerous proportion year after year!

All rhetoric of reducing sound, air and water pollution just vanished into thin air with brutal attacks launched upon space land ponds and rivers! Apart from such barbaric exhibition of muscle; what a grave insult upon the essence and purity of the religious ritual or festival named Chhath!

And what to say of the heart-shattering death (actually "devotee"-induced death) of the little 7-year-old Malda boy Sakibul Seikh in the ambulance itself right in front of the eyes of his helpless father Sazlum Seikh as the Kolkata-bound vehicle got stranded due to a road blockade in Nadia by the Jagadhatri Puja organisers demanding a go-ahead for traditional immersion processions! Despite pleading at the

feet of the demonstrators, the Jagadhatri "Bhaktas" didn't allow the ambulance to pass with the child breathing his last without minimum treatment after 3 hours! Yes, the traditional immersion procession of the Mother deity gets accorded higher preference over the most basic human right of the child in this "holy" "pious" - infested land!

Do we call this worship of God/Goddess? Perhaps God has also escaped from the horizon by witnessing the "Devotion" of such Bhaktas! The barbarism being increasingly witnessed during various festivals clearly prove that all talks of devotion and spirituality are nothing but a farce. Rather festivals are being cleverly exploited to display a horror show of muscular might and clout - be it religious, racial, economic or political.

It is high time that the administration rises to the occasion by reviving and prohibiting such displays of muscle and severely punishing the offenders who create mayhem, pollute the environment, contaminate the water bodies, block the roads and indulge in all possible nuisance in the name of festival and religion.

Yours etc.,  
Kajal Chatterjee,  
Via email

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

"Constant exposure to dangers  
will breed contempt for them."

— Annaeus Seneca

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.96 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2021

### Meghalaya needs to know its USP

MEGHALAYA will turn 50 next year but it still does not know its unique selling point (USP). Is it Tourism, Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries, Veterinary or all of the above? Tourism obviously cannot be clubbed with Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries and Veterinary. And Tourism seems pretty well sorted out as far as managing the entire value chain is concerned, more so since many eminent hoteliers and tour promoters have already launched themselves into this sector. It is the Agri-Horti, Fisheries and Veterinary sectors that require sound guidance and action points. That there is now a Farmers' Commission in the State headed by a progressive and grounded bureaucrat whose connection with the farming community is legendary, right from the time he was the district administrator, Ri Bhoi is hope-giving

Agriculture, Horticulture, Veterinary and Fisheries should actually converge under one Ministry because they are interlinked. Fisheries as it is practised by progressive farmers lends itself to aquaculture and hydroponics which is being tried out by entrepreneurs with much success. This model must be replicated because the production of vegetables through Aquaculture and Hydroponics both of which benefit from the waste matter derived out of fish tanks and which is circulated in a very efficient system is phenomenal.

The fish farmers of several villages adjoining Mawlyndep are now ready to embrace Biofloc fish farming techniques. This will yield them better profits than rearing fish in ponds which also make the fish susceptible to disease carried by flowing water. The recognition given by the country to two farmers from Meghalaya recently is a signal for the state to invest better in the Agri-Horti sector. Spices have been Meghalaya's strength. Yet it has taken so long for the State to recognise that it has a treasure in the turmeric with a curcumin content of 7.5% which is the highest in the world. Only now is the Department giving a fillip to this spice which is known for its medicinal properties. In fact, even the ginger here is known to have oil extract with high medicinal and spice content. Meghalaya already produces and has a market for strawberries. Farmers have meanwhile learnt to improve both the quality and the production rate of strawberries by interacting with other growers. It has taken a while for Meghalaya to come up with farmer's cooperatives and self help groups – an action plan that has the potential to revolutionise farming in that the entire value chain from growing to harvesting to marketing is taken care of. The Lakadong turmeric farmers have shown the way forward. The Government needs to invest in the farmers' aspirations.

# Mission Lakadong: Beckoning the world!

By KN Kumar

Genuine heroes who move societies toward progress are neither dramatic nor glamorous. The ever-toiling farmers or army jawans prepared to sacrifice their lives for the nation are not in the public domain while the loud and flashy people dominate media space. Fake narratives mislead the broader society so much that it starts worshipping the false gods. I have not much idea about the sociology of heroism, but I know for sure that Padma Shri Ms Trinity Saioo and Mr Nanandro Marak are our state's genuine heroes. Their steadfast commitment to progress, despite their humble backgrounds and limited means, makes them what they are – different from the rest! Some farmers I interacted with have felt that such a recognition restores their professional pride and personal self-esteem. While Trinity Saioo is known for her work in Mission Lakadong, Nanandro Marak is the man for Black Pepper in Garo Hills. The state department of Agriculture & Fisheries' Welfare created an ecosystem that has let such unpretentious people emerge and be discovered by the country. My compliments to the Department. Evidently, the central government too has modified its process to unearth such people from the ground who indisputably deserve national recognition. Two consecutive Padma Shris and both farmers – who is leading us to progress?

First, let me take you back to early 2018 when a conscious view was taken to capitalize on the opportunity presented by Lakadong turmeric, the demand for which was growing, but the volumes were not. Farmers ready to cultivate had no seed rhizomes, entrepreneurs willing to process had no volumes, the technology was available for induction, but no one to invest, and the department's officers willing to work had neither a Mission nor funds nor guidance. Hence a decision to launch an exclusive Mission Lakadong was made, and the department sought the support of the Meghalaya Institute of Entrepreneurship (MIE) to prepare the Mission document, and the Hon'ble Governor of Meghalaya launched the Mission Lakadong on April 25, 2018. Hindsight teaches us many things. I think Victor Hugo was right when he said – "nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come." The time for Lakadong Turmeric had to come!

India produces 78% of the world's Turmeric. However, with a total production of 16,630 M.T. (including other

varieties of Turmeric), the share of Meghalaya in the national turmeric production was just 1.79% in 2014-15. Though our production remained more or less the same, our share dropped down to 1.74% by 2017-18. What it means is that other states like Telangana and Maharashtra moved ahead with higher production.

The first challenge, therefore, was to increase the area and production. We knew we wouldn't count until the volumes were sufficiently large, and we also knew that until the farmers are sensitized about the value Lakadong offers to the world, it would not be possible for us to expand the area rapidly. At the launch of the Mission Lakadong in 2018, the number of Lakadong farmers in West Jaintia Hills was about 1000, and the production was 2,577 Metric tonnes. The numbers needed to go up manifold, which meant more area and more farmers had to be brought into Lakadong cultivation. The department notified Trinity Saioo as a member of the 'Committee of Farmer Leaders' consisting of fifteen women leaders from West Jaintia Hills district whom we met periodically. They were our ambassadors. There was continual communication between them and us, and the ground level difficulties were always discussed and shared with us, so we could attempt mid-course corrections if required. Trinity played a significant role in mobilizing the farmers and in reaching the government's message. She helped form and educate the SHGs, which now number 129, each with about ten active farmers. So, the number of Lakadong farmers through the SHG route alone is 1290, and another 6000 individual farmers came forward to undertake the cultivation, taking the total number of farmers currently drawn into Lakadong to 7290. That is a seven-fold increase in the number of farmers in three years. An additional area of 1075 hectares is now brought into Lakadong, and the additional production is now 6368 Metric tonnes (figures for 20-21 are estimates).

A lot has happened since the Mission's launch in 2018. An expensive component of turmeric cultivation is the seed rhizome. Its non-availability and high price are two significant constraints. Since Lakadong is unique to our state and the farmers cannot obtain seed rhizome anywhere else, procurement must be done only locally. At Rs. 40 per Kg. and the recommended seed rate of

2.5 M.T. per hectare, the cost of seed alone is Rupees one lakh per hectare – a significant deterrent for small farmers. So, the department tried out a rapid multiplication technology using single bud rhizome in pro-trays, a technique initially developed by the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. Through this technology, more plants (5-6 plants) of good quality can be produced from a single rhizome, so the seed rate comes down to about 600 Kgs./ha, which can save the farmers up to Rs.76,000, per hectare. Since the process is simple, farmers or SHGs or entrepreneurs can take up the rapid multiplication. Technology is now good to go, and we have targeted to train farmers of ten villages this year. The idea is to minimize the cost of cultivation and maximize the farmers' profit.

There are other initiatives. With the help of the Smart Village Movement, a Farmers Development Centre is being established at Shangpung. To be set up by e-Fresh, a company, this Centre will provide one-stop services to the farmers and help them market their produce with the support of the Samunnati Foundation. With the support of the National Horticulture Board, a programme to develop the Lakadong Cluster is being attempted. The NITI Aayog has identified West Jaintia Hills under its 'One District One Product (ODOP)' programme and has already facilitated an agreement with a Kerala-based procurement company. A ten-tonne order was negotiated, and the consignment was already sent. Apart from the domestic market, the export market is also slowly opening up. Last year, exploratory shipments were made to four countries – Netherlands, USA, U.K. and Russia. The total value of the exports was about Rs 30 lakh. Since the feedback is excellent, the volume of exports will be higher this year.

Two new FPOs are being formed in the district. The LIFE Spice Processing Co-operative Society, Laskein, has now become a Training-cum-incubation centre. The Spices Board, Kochi, has given us an instant Curcumin Testing Unit, which the farmers have already tested and is ready to be deployed. The process for obtaining the Geographical Indication for Lakadong Turmeric is on. We may receive the G.I. tag for Lakadong Turmeric in another six months, further improving our brand.

Let us now examine the status of the processing of

the Lakadong Turmeric in the West Jaintia Hills district. The figures are inaccurate, but one estimate puts the number of pulverizing mills in the West Jaintia Hills district at 40. The cumulative grinding capacity is unknown, but we estimate it to be about a tonne per day. Our current value chain stops at the turmeric powder, and I believe that only about 10-15% of the total production is getting ground into powder, the rest being sold in the form of dried slices. The drying process is still in the open, neither scientific nor hygienic. So, ten young fabricators from the district were sent to Teewave Technologies, Hyderabad, to test-fabricate solar dehydrators. After a month-long training, they are now ready to fabricate them locally. Four such dehydrators were already locally fabricated and inducted, and the farmer feedback being excellent, 50 solar dehydrators are now proposed for induction this year. But the most profitable and critical product in the value chain is Curcumin, which we can't extract as of now, which is a loss of opportunity.

As the Mission increases production, the time to establish curcumin extraction units is now. There is not a single curcumin extraction unit in the entire northeast. It is common knowledge that Lakadong is valued because of its high curcumin content. The global curcumin market valued at Rs 437 crore in 2019 is expected to grow at 12.7% per annum. The Corona pandemic has triggered massive demand for Curcumin globally. India will gain as the largest producer, and Meghalaya will gain even more because of our monopoly. While the farmers get Rs.150 per kg. of Turmeric dried slices, 95% pure curcumin extract is sold at Rs. 6400 a Kg. As the curcumin content of Lakadong is averaging at 7%, we may need 14 Kgs. of Lakadong to produce a Kilo of Curcumin. The procurement cost of Lakadong is Rs. 2100 while the Curcumin fetches three times that of it. The extraction units are not that expensive to establish, and a loan can be mobilized under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund, with an interest cap of 9% and an interest subvention of 3% provided by the Government of India. So, the effective rate of interest is just 6%.

Through this article, I urge the state's entrepreneurs to establish Curcumin extraction units in the state. We have just begun our journey. Hugo may well be right. After all, the time for Lakadong has come.

The writer is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' (Empowerment) Commission

## Religious, ethnic intolerance threatens to spin out of control US, Europe fail to notice patterns in emerging crisis scenarios

By James M Dorsey

The family of nations is balancing on the edge of an abyss as mushrooming religious and ethnic intolerance becomes the norm.

Western as well as non-Western societies have helped pave the road towards the abyss: the West by abandoning the post-World War Two principle of 'Never Again' and the non-Western world by never embracing it and failing to adopt the principle of 'forgive but don't forget.'

Exasperating matters is the fact that the United States and Europe look at individual crises rather than a threatening pattern of developments. In doing so, they fail to recognise the structural problems that challenge Western values of democracy, tolerance, and pluralism.

Citing a litany of crises and tensions in Central and Eastern Europe, Balkan scholar Damir Marusic warns that "the whole edifice feels rickety. It feels like the order we have all taken for granted since the end of the Cold War is badly decaying, and has gotten so fragile that it might well shatter soon... We notice individual problems, but we don't see how it adds up, nor how we got here... We are still, in some strange way, operating as if things are more or less fine—yes, adjustments must be made, but our world is durable and sound."

Marusic argues that the rot in the system has been exacerbated by the troubled US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 Al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington. "As the final collapse of the Afghanistan project earlier this year proved, the whole optimistic premise of nation- and order-building upon which the EU project is ultimately premised was also undermined by America's failures," Marusic said.

Geopolitical battles are being fought on the backs of innocent and desperate people. They fuel tensions and threaten stability in Central and Eastern Europe and spark humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen and Afghanistan. An ethnic and religious divide characterises the tens of thousands of Middle Eastern migrants ferried by Belarus with Russian support to the Polish border. Ten British soldiers have been dispatched to the border to help Poland with fencing.

The exploitation of deep-seated religious and ethnic hostility drove Bosnia Serb leader Milorad Dodik to threaten to withdraw Serb troops from the army of Bosnia Herzegovina and create a separate Serb force. Bosnia Herzegovina was created as a federation at the end of the Bosnian war in the 1990s with Muslim, Serb and Croatian entities that enjoyed autonomy. The federation retained control of the military, top echelons of the judiciary, and tax collection. Dodik has said that the Bosnian Serb parliament would also, in what would amount to de facto secession, establish a separate Serb judiciary, and tax administration.

The writing is on the wall across the globe from the United States and Europe to Afghanistan and China.

Islamophobia and anti-Semitism have become mainstream. Hindu-Muslim tensions spill across South Asian borders. Sunni Muslims persecute their Shiite brethren in Afghanistan, risking clashes between the Taliban and Iran. The Christian minority in the cradle of Abrahamian faiths has been decimated.

China has launched a frontal assault on Turkic ethnic and religious identity in the north-western province

of Xinjiang that has gone largely unchallenged in the Muslim world.

At the core of the problem lie not social media that function as megaphones, aggregators and creators of echo chambers and silos rather than instigators but political, religious, ethnic, and cultural leaders who play on base instincts in pursuit of popularity and power.

Lebanon, Iraq and potentially Afghanistan are fallouts of the institutionalisation and instrumentalisation of religious and ethnic prejudice and intolerance at the expense of notions of mutual respect, adherence to human dignity and coexistence.

Secularist warlords loot the Lebanese and Iraqi states and weaken their institutions. Recent violence in Beirut suggests that protagonists, including former Christian warlords and Shiite allies of Iran, are willing to risk a second round of civil war to secure their vested interests, sending a middle-income country spiralling into widespread poverty.

Long-term, the solution is education systems that stress the importance of humanitarian and moral values as well as religious and ethnic tolerance as the guardrails of governance and politics and ensure that ethnic and religious prejudice and racism are socially taboo attitudes.

The short-term tackling of the problem will have to involve dialogue and negotiation. A recent study showed that John F. Kennedy's decision to seek an arms control treaty rather than escalate a debilitating and risky arms race after the Soviet Union detonated the world's most powerful nuclear weapon in 1962 succeeded where accelerated conflict may not have.

Applied to religious and ethnic intolerance, lessons learnt from Kennedy's approach require that governments and religious and ethnic groups that pay lip service to interfaith and other forms of dialogue or assert that they promote democratic and humanitarian values are held to account rather than be allowed to rest on their laurels with hollow promises and declarations.

This year's chairmanship by Indonesia of the Group of 20 (G20) that brings together the world's largest economies has an opportunity to stress humanitarian and democratic values and promote a framework for dialogue. The chairmanship puts Nahdlatul Ulama, the world's largest Muslim civil society organisation that emphasises those values, on global public display given that it is poised to play a role in the G20's inter-faith talk.

Jon Grinspan, a curator of political history at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, argued in a New York Times op-ed entitled 'The Last Time America Broke,' that the United States, despite deep-seated polarisation that has brought religious and ethnic intolerance to the forefront, had not passed the point of no return. He noted that civil society had repeatedly brought America back from the brink.

"We're not just helplessly hurtling toward inevitable civil war; we can be actors in this story. The first step is acknowledging the dangers inherent in democracy. To move forward, we should look backwards and see that we're struggling not with a collapse but with a relapse," Grinspan wrote.

It's a message that is as true for the rest of the world as it is for the United States. (IPA Service) Courtesy: Arabian Post

### Letters to the Editor

#### Medical seats vis-a-vis colleges of choice

Editor,

Appropos the letter, 'Unscrupulous Allotment of MBBS Seats,' (ST Nov 15, 2021) I would like to add a few points. At the outset, I congratulate those who qualified for the NEET 2021. More so, as all should know, since the NEET took charge to re-examine our students that topped in Physics, Chemistry and Botany, be they from MBOSE, CBSE or ICSE, only one applicant from a Shillong School had qualified for NEET in 2020 despite the Scheduled Tribe concession for the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos.

Few were absorbed in Veterinary Science and B.Pharm, and that after two attempts. In 2011, the then UPA Government learned of capitation fees running to lakhs of rupees charged by coaching centres that coached students who were not directly selected by the State's Directorate of Health Services (DHSs). The DHS collected all the applications of aspirants, and asked them to name the college of choice (first and second choice). After scrutinising the applications the merit list and

allocation of seats was hung at the DHS Office and published in newspapers.

In 2012, the UPA Government used the National Testing Agency (NTA) to thwart this menace. The NTA transitioned into the National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET). But things only worsened and the Supreme Court then quashed NEET's eligibility in 2013 one year after it was born. It was a big blow to the coaching centres who by then were mushrooming in all the towns and cities. Sadly, the persons most affected by the apex court's judgment – namely the coaching centres and books for short cut learning, filed a revised petition in the Supreme Court and the eligibility of NTA/NEET was restored.

Hence from 2019, the year the NEET take charge of the exams, only one aspirant could qualify. To hear the news that many applicants have qualified this year makes me overjoyed, although the number of students from Meghalaya qualifying for the NEET is pretty small, unlike those that qualified by virtue of their Class XII marks from 1965 to 2018. Then it was pure merit and hard work, with parents' inspirations. Those students scored 96% in Physics, Chemistry and Biology by studying books prescribed by CBSE or ICSE

right from Classes 9 – 12 and were taught by experienced teachers. They made it to medical colleges and are today doctors serving the PHCs and CHCs and the civil hospitals. Around ten doctors from the State are serving in AIIMS, JIPMER and other medical colleges.

It is unfortunate that today the method of allocating medical seats to students from Meghalaya who qualified for NEET is based on political clout. This brings to naught the hard work and merit of students. To subject the choice of medical colleges to politics rather than merit is demoralising for students. However, let me tell the writer that this rot as far as choice of medical colleges is concerned is not new. It had set in some years ago. This newspaper had in fact carried a similar letter some years ago. The victims' parents then had threatened to move court but apparently relented. This has only encouraged the arbitrary allocation of medical seats even today.

We live in a modern, competitive world where merit and resolute hard work should not fall prey to political pressure. And to learn that these manoeuvrings in the DHS continue even today is very disturbing indeed. But I would like to counsel the medical aspirants to be contented with any college

allotted, as the college does not really matter. It is the spirit to serve especially the poor and the marginalised sections of the society especially during these Covid times when doctors are most needed, that really matters. On that note, I wish all the medical students the best of luck.

Yours etc.,  
James Kharmih  
Shillong -1

#### Violence that merits strong condemnation

Editor  
The deadly ambush of late Colonel Viplav Tripathi who was travelling along with his wife and a six year old son deserves the strongest condemnation from all quarters. The dastardly act by insurgent groups of Manipur speaks about their barbaric nature. Col Tripathi was escorted by a quick reaction team and yet could not escape the IED blast brings to the fore the question as to how effective the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) is. This Act is termed as a 'draconian law' but it has failed to curtail insurgency in Manipur as well as in other parts of the Northeast. Ironically AFSPA is not applied in Maoist hit areas

where frequent ambushes and violence have become a regular feature. The Assam Rifles being the mainstay for internal security in the northeast region has always been at the forefront in curbing all sorts of illegal activities. This deadly incident would now require a complete overhaul and a re-look as to whether internal security in the North East and the application of AFSPA have been able to reduce militant violence or if the Act has in fact affected civil society.

Yours etc.,  
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar  
Shillong

#### A grave inhuman act

Editor,  
A deadly ambush near the Myanmar border in Manipur that led to several fatalities brings into sharp focus China's possible role in supporting insurgencies in India's Northeast and creating trouble in the region amid escalating border tensions between the two countries. Questions about China's role in creating trouble in the region have been raised earlier too. India's trade pact with Taiwan had provoked China and it had warned India that it would retaliate by supporting Northeast separatists.

In addition, China believes that Sikkim is not a part of India.

It is assumed that insurgent outfits in the Northeast including Manipur have links with armed groups in Myanmar. Chinese weapons reach the Northeast through these groups. Besides, China provides safe havens to insurgent leaders like ULFA commander Paresah Baruah and National Socialist Council of Nagaland's Shimrang.

Amid mounting tension along the LAC, China must have re-established its ties with insurgent groups. It must be noted that the latest ambush occurred at a time when the security situation in the NE had improved significantly. Given that India and China have hardened their positions on LAC, there is a possibility of China resorting to a different form of warfare in the NE to pressurise India. However, China has denied the Chinese involvement and accused India of training and funding Tibetan insurgents against China.

Yours etc.,  
VENU G. S.,  
Kollam

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of *The Shillong Times*

"Climate change is happening, humans are causing it, and I think this is perhaps the most serious environmental issue facing us."

— Bill Nye

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 97 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2021

### Pollution and vacillation

GOING round and round and reaching nowhere is a style that our governance systems are perfecting with rare zeal. The issue of Delhi's air pollution is a case in point. For several years, the Centre and the state government of Delhi were seized of the problem occurring during the winter season. Delhi came up with the odd-even scheme for vehicles, many blamed farmers in the states of UP, Punjab and Haryana for the stubble burning after the harvest season, and then the Centre and Delhi government went into hibernation until the next winter. Now, with another winter setting in, the air quality index is again classified as Very Poor. The saga, thus, is unending – and rather worsening by the year.

On orders from the Supreme Court, the Centre held a meeting with the four states on Tuesday to take matters forward. Notably, the Supreme Court and central government has realised that stubble burning is not the main cause of air pollution in Delhi. It contributed to only 10 percent of the pollution while three main contributors to the present situation were dust, industry and transport – together accounting for 76 per cent. By now, remedial steps have acquired more urgency. A reason why the Delhi government has stated it is ready to declare a lockdown and issued an advisory to office-goers to shift to work-from-home mode so that less vehicles and air-conditioners will be switched on.

A matter of priority is that a sense of seriousness needs to be injected into the minds of those who govern the nation. In the absence of this, whether it be the UPA or the NDA, the end result is that the nation is being let down on most fronts. The problem in relation to air pollution in Delhi, or pollution of water bodies across the nation, must be seen from two angles. One, the sway of vehicle-culture, developed in the last two decades. The vehicle density on the roads in Delhi is the highest. Not so with Mumbai, the nation's main industrial hub, where local trains are the main mode of public transport. Despite the belated introduction of the Delhi Metro, it has its limitations. Almost everyone in Delhi wants to drive or ride a vehicle. Add to this the problem of lack of coordination between Centre and states. The Centre fails to hold – more so when the leadership there is weak. Indira Gandhi had the grit and determination to impose her will on the nation. The same thing cannot be said about weaklings who sat in the chair thereafter.

# Sheep stealing the main political activity

By Albert Thyrning

The BJP is the latest party to claim that some Congress MLAs are in touch with it to contest the next Assembly elections under the saffron flag. The NPP has time and again predicted the mass exodus of Congress legislators before 2023. The UDP too has revealed that there are feelers from other parties to join it. In the 2018 general elections the above three managed the sheep stealing acts quite well leading to the loss of the grand old party and pushing it to the Opposition role after a gap of almost ten years. On its part, the Congress has been trying hard to bring back turncoats ever since Vincent Pala was appointed as MPCC president. The latest attempt is to make DD Lapang 'come home'. The Congress chief revealed that many church leaders have written to him urging him to lure back the five-time chief minister. Who are these churchmen who decide which politicians should be in which political parties? Do these clergymen suggest that the Church is with the Congress? In the meanwhile, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) has indicated that it will be in the fray in 2023 as part of its ambition for a greater national role. The 'Bengal' party might convince Mukul Sangma and his loyalists to see merit in ditching the party that made him minister, deputy chief minister and chief minister and join forces with Mamata Banerjee.

Switching political parties is merely for personal benefit. Politicians don't mind any political camp provided they are in a favourable position. Remaining in a party is fine as long as the party is able to serve their interests. Once a party is no longer in a position to oblige them they easily become deserters. The 79 year old Amarinder Singh, former chief minister of Punjab, is the latest example. It is easily inferred that the veteran leader, LAPANG quit Congress in 2018 because it had lost the election. The party was unable to offer him any post. He joined the National People's Party after being offered the post of chief adviser to the NPP-led government in Meghalaya with perks and facilities equivalent to a cabinet minister. If he senses that the Congress will return to power, another U-turn could materialise.

The most venerable party is the Congress. All other parties are targeting it. The only option for other parties to prevent the Meghalaya Congress from winning the 2023 election is by pilfering their sheep. This strategy worked in all the three recent by-elections. The 1885 founded party that has taken deep roots in this hill state, came short of winning because other parties tricked three of their workers to contest

the elections not to win but to defeat the Congress candidates. The strength of the Congress is its weakest link. Other parties know the best bet to beat the Congress is the Congress itself.

As sheep stealing is all geared up to be the main political activity in the remaining months leading to the much-awaited 2023, political philosophy is the victim. Ideology, which is supposed to be the chief attraction or deterrent, does not matter anymore. We have in AL Hek a man who does not mind donning two diametrically opposite political ideologies alternately to remain a



minister. Other ministers from the previous Congress government too are in the chair because they did not mind shifting loyalty for the sake of power.

Prior to the 2018 elections, the NPP's watchword and slogan was change. This writer warned that no change could be expected because the ruling party/parties could be different but the ministers would be the same. Probably with the exception of the chief minister, others have

*"The most venerable party is the Congress. All other parties are targeting it. The only option for other parties to prevent the Meghalaya Congress from winning the 2023 election is by pilfering their sheep. This strategy worked in all the three recent by-elections."*

the same mentality, the same approach, the same style, the same lure for filthy lucre and the same lethargy. Nothing has changed really. Now we see that the expectation in governance and performance is nowhere close to the hype created five years ago. In the next elections too the vicious cycle could be repeated. The same people will be in different parties. Very few fresh blood will plunge in. No new idea will emerge.

With sheep stealing the chief tactic assessment on the performance of the MDA government will escape media and public scrutiny. Anti-incumbency will be blunted by the hype of high profile

political entries and exits. Issues will be side-lined. With more than a year prior to the election much media space has been occupied by speculations of shifting political allegiance by heavy weights. In the coming days and months the focus will be almost entirely on the drama of 'who has left which party and who he or she has aligned with.' The electorate is forced to witness this theatre forgetting the matters that concern the state and their lives.

The parties in power will, of course, amplify the 'achievements' of the government. More stress will be on reminding the vot-

as the contractor has been given necessary instruction as asserted by the chief minister.

While the above initiatives have been announced just a year before the elections, do farmers need help only now? Is not Rs. 200 crore a meagre amount for the farmers of the whole state? Did the scenic Nongkhnum not need government intervention earlier? Why has the government neglected Nongstoin-Wahkaji for so long? The reason for the full 'steam' push is because public memory is short. In election rallies the latest 'accomplishments' of the government will be publicised with vigour. But the most important question is, how much of implementation will actually be achieved in one year. Even the 12th district may not be fully functional in one year's time. But never mind! Even if little happens on the ground the NPP will appeal to the voters to vote for it for the second time running so that the initiatives will be completed if it reassumes office. But it is not only the NPP or the UDP, all MLAs implement their schemes at the fag end of their tenure to tell their 'success stories' to the public enticing them to re-elect them.

The Chief Minister will probably tour the other districts in the state announcing schemes and projects until the model code of conduct comes into effect. Mukul Sangma did the same thing in 2018. He failed to return to power because the people could judge his intent. Of course, the departure of prominent rebel leaders happened because they protested against his 'style' of leadership. Today, it could be his turn to turn his back against the party that has given him much.

One of the trump cards of the government will be the efforts to settle the border disputes with Assam. Though it is likely that the complex issue will make little headway yet the government will claim it has taken concrete steps in solving the decades old disagreement with the neighbouring state. Being a sensitive issue the government may cash in the political mileage. There are already reports that the government's move is for political reasons – gains of certain parties. The people in the border areas see through the government's questionable intention.

More than anything else, stories of 'sheep stealing' will make it to the headlines the mainstream and social media. This is the best strike for all political parties for 2023. The public will be deprived of a meaningful deliberation and discourse on the merits of whether this government should remain or another coalition replace it.

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## People vs. COP26 Time for politicians and billionaires to listen

By Ramzy Baroud

Of all the speeches and political grandstanding at the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26), the words of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador were the most profound and least hypocritical.

López Obrador raged against the "technocrats and neoliberals"—world leaders who hold the future of humanity in their hands. This was a direct reference to leaders of the powerful countries that "increase their fuel production, at the same time that they hold summits for the protection of the environment," while arriving in Glasgow on private jets.

Indeed, hypocrisy continues to define what is meant to be a collective global fight against climate change and its ravaging, often deadly consequences.

Over-consumption, inequality, and unchecked capitalism were hardly the defining keywords at the COP26. Such references were largely made by "radical" and "leftist" environmentalists outside the conference halls. Pointing out the obvious has sadly become a radical act.

Inside the posh summit halls, it was politics as usual, though concealed as virtuous concern for the fate of all humankind.

"It's one minute to midnight on that doomsday clock and we need to act now," British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said, using a forceful and dramatic tone. He himself had admitted to

rarely the solutions.

So, how do we resolve this riddle?

The manifesto of Climate Action Network (CAN), Europe's leading NGO coalition fighting dangerous climate change, offers some clues: "A sustainable, just, resilient society over the long term needs a proactive approach that is holistic, value-based, and people-centered, addressing existing inequalities and power imbalances."

That is definitely the starting point of a serious conversation on the environment. The self-serving logic of politicians and billionaires can only make us sink deeper in the unrelenting quagmire.

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, who also arrived at the summit on his private jet, pledged to invest \$2 billion for climate change by 2030, after receiving an "epiphany" during his 10-minute space "expedition". "I was told that seeing the Earth from space changes the lens through which you see the world. But I was not prepared for how much that would be true," he said in his speech.

Of course, for the likes of Bezos, such generous offers are quite beneficial. It further contributes to their successful business brands, while deflecting criticism that capitalism and limitless consumerism—thus incalculable, often undeserved amassing of wealth—have pushed our environment to the point of desperation.



the futility of past exercises of a similar rhetoric of the past. "I was there in Paris six years ago when we agreed to net zero (emissions) and all those promises will be nothing but blah, blah, blah."

For his part, French President Emmanuel Macron lashed out at the "big emitters, whose national strategies are not in line with our 1.5°C objectives," stating that "too many of us make commitments here and then sign trade agreements that do exactly the opposite."

These leaders were not the exception. But others, such as President Joe Biden, lashed out at specific countries, particularly the U.S.' global competitors in trade and political influence. His style of speech was distinctly different from Johnson's and Macron's. "The fact that China, trying to assert, understandably, a new role in the world as a world leader, not showing up? Come on!" he said, following that with a jab against "Putin and Russia." That is, in itself, a sad commentary; Biden had traveled thousands of miles merely to settle some trivial political scores.

Such futile political rhetoric accentuates our current dichotomy as we face the repercussions of our own abuse of the environment. On the one hand, we do need leaders who are capable of appreciating the gravity of the situation while, on the other hand, international politics has often proven to be the cause of problems and

However, can the very people who have originated the problem be the ones who fix it, without even acknowledging their role in the crisis in the first place? Never.

"Enough hypocrisy and fad," López Obrador said, before attending the Glasgow summit. The Mexican leader, often dubbed as "populist" by the likes of the Economist, Reuters, and others, has pointed precisely to the ailment that resulted in the current environmental impasse. "We must fight the massive monstrous inequality that exists in the world," he said.

The truth is this: The answer to the intensifying growing environmental crisis lies in our own hands, not those of politicians. The latter will only act if we raise our collective voice and pressure them to do so.

According to the latest report issued last August by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "human influence has warmed the climate at a rate that is unprecedented in at least the last 2,000 years." All the fiery speeches, fancy summits, and numerous political pledges have done very little to reverse this dismal and worsening trajectory.

Expecting COP26 to save the world is wishful thinking. Our fate is truly in our own hands. It always has been. It is high time for politicians to stop talking and, for once, truly listen. (IPA Service) Courtesy: People's World

### Letters to the Editor

#### Prompt while imposing; Sedate while relaxing

Editor,

The caption above may be described as the Government's attitude towards the churches in our state. There has been so much hue and cry as to why there are no relaxations on congregational gatherings of particularly the Christians while every other festival, celebrations, elections and so on, have been going on with zero implementation of covid protocols – even little children have been seen participating in them. Glancing at the past few months we are reminded of how the restrictions were imposed on all including religious gatherings, and it may be safe to say that churches immediately responded to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis by following each one of the restrictions and protocols issued from time to time. These have had a dramatic impact on a broad spectre of human rights,

including freedom of movement and assembly, which in turn have an impact on other rights such as freedom of religion or belief.

In trying to battle an invisible enemy, countries around the world have had different responses and the same can be said about our state of Meghalaya. Here too places of worship were immediately shut down and also mass meetings like Synod, Procession, Presbytery, Districts, and others were stopped; and at that time no one disputed that the pandemic calls for temporary safety measures with the expectation that the restrictions would be removed when it is safe to do so. In well-functioning democracies of which we too are a part of, citizens may reasonably expect their governments to lift the current restrictions in due time. However, now there is a concern that the pandemic will exacerbate authoritarian trends in government. With regards to religious communities and minorities, this may come in the form of continued stigmatisation, discrimination, and harassment.

In societies where leaders and politicians have a history of prioritising private over public interests, there is already established levels of public distrust in political leadership and the integrity of public officials have been questioned. Recently though relaxations on regular church service was issued by the government, however mass gatherings and attendance of children are still prohibited which has resulted in a dramatic drop in attendance of church services.

Our Khasi culture does not encourage discussions at dinner tables and many times elders tell the younger members to be quiet while dining but in these last few days religion and politics have clearly eaten at our dinner tables. Religion and politics can be polarizing, precisely because they deal with important matters that are deeply personal and close to our passions. But these discussions do not have to be polarizing or combative. When people say, "Don't mix religion and politics," they actually mean "Don't bring your faith into the public square where I can see it." In other words,

hide your faith outside of your place of worship because there is a separation between Church and State. So, the question arises: should we really be silent or should we ask questions as to why all other gatherings are allowed except those conducted by the Churches. The reason may just be because there is no political gain whether the protocols on religious gatherings are lifted or not, so no one in the government is bothered about what may be called minor issues to them.

The pandemic has also exposed the good and bad side of society as a whole. It can be said that we are like what Charles Dickens' starting lines of his Tale of Two Cities, are, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in

short, the period was so far like the present period that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."

Hence the role of leaders is not to pretend that the unique values of the country or society will save them, but to support those that need help. That judicious combination of Commander and Leader is never simple, but it is necessary. In some cases, the commander is often decisive, but sadly their direction and actions depend upon the polls and all the rest matters very little. We the citizens are the sufferers and the most vulnerable because our commanders and their decisions to lockdown, to quarantine, to issue protocols etc., in the state and even the country are made within just a few hours' notice with seemingly little planning. The people are to bear the consequences of the decisions, from the poorest members of the society to the most affluent. It has even affected thoughts in the spiritual realm. Hence as important as it is for the commander to be decisive and sure while im-

posing restrictions, the call is for our commanders not to be sedate, and slow when the time comes to relax the restrictions imposed.

Having said all this we should remember that the virus is still present at some levels in the population and only a minority of people have antibodies to the virus – and it is still not known whether these antibodies confer immunity. This means that most people are still susceptible to COVID-19. This fact must be taken into account when decisions about reopening public areas and also churches are being made and as responsible citizens and congregations we should follow all measures to reduce the risk of another wave of the dreaded virus.

Yours etc.,  
Wanjop Warbah,  
Via email

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"Cultivation of mind should be the ultimate aim of human existence."

— B. R. Ambedkar

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 98 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2021

### Of intractable border disputes

THE border disputes between Assam and Meghalaya should have been sorted out in 1971 when North Eastern States (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 was crafted to deal with all issues related to the creation of new states and union territories carved out of the State of Assam. The preamble for the formation of the State of Meghalaya reads, "On and from the appointed day there shall be formed a new State, to be known as the State of Meghalaya, comprising— (a) the territories which immediately before that day were comprised in the autonomous State of Meghalaya formed under section 3 of the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969 (55 of 1969); and (b) so much of the territories comprised within the cantonment and municipality of Shillong as did not form part of that autonomous State, and thereupon the said territories shall cease to form part of the existing State of Assam."

The contours of the borders and of its residents have changed considerably in the past 49 years. And it is to Meghalaya's discredit that its political leaders turned the issue into a political football that comes alive just before the elections and is forgotten thereafter. Whenever some pious noises were made by members of the Opposition in the Assembly, there would be bureaucratic level talks which ended in more papers being added to files. This is, in fact, the first time that a Chief Minister from Meghalaya has taken it upon himself to discuss the matter upfront with his counterpart the Chief Minister of Assam in what appears to be a serious attempt to resolve the border disputes. The formation of regional committees for each of the areas of dispute headed by MLAs of those areas has also brought a certain clarity and removed the obfuscation. By talking to the residents along the border who are at the receiving end of the conflicts and asking them to opt whether they wish to remain with Meghalaya or Assam a lot of the irritants are ironed out. At the end of the day the border residents have to co-exist peacefully.

Those who have held the reins of governance in Meghalaya should have the grace to admit that the border areas with Assam have been woefully neglected even while the neighbouring state has been more generous in its treatment of the border residents. These are lessons to be learnt. Turning serious issues into political slugfests is the work of insecure men who are elected to rule the state but whose insidious intent is to retain power at all costs. The slip is showing, albeit a little late in the day.

# Inconsistent application of SOPs

By Rev. Lyndan Syiem

Those of us who have been charged with enforcing the government's SOPs in religious places of worship have been shocked by the utter disregard for such rules in recent government functions and political events. In Churches and in other places of worship we have tried our best to strictly observe the SOPs, in order to prevent the spread of COVID 19 in our premises. We have obeyed the government even if it meant inconveniencing our members, changing the pattern and timing of our worship services, and re-

continue to follow and enforce SOPs when even high officials do not. The answer obviously is that SOPs help guard against viral infection, irrespective of whether others follow them or not.

But people then move to the second question of why the government keeps asking religious leaders to help with enforcing SOPs and promoting vaccination, when the actions of some of their own functionaries obviously contradict the official

civil functions and political events. Such an inconsistent policy will unfortunately beget radical, populist leaders who will tap the mood of resentment and create a base of anti-establishment followers, as has happened in some Western countries, notably in the USA. I need to emphasize here that many religious leaders (as well as many leaders of local dorbars and social organizations) are totally with the government. We are together in the fight against

in May 2021. But this does not mean that we become complacent, because we do not know how this unpredictable virus will further mutate. The Health Department has not officially lifted pandemic restrictions and neither should the public relax their guard, nor religious places of worship, nor high officials. Health experts are speculating about a third wave in India but many of us are praying for God's intervention in preventing this.

In any case, Meghalaya does not want to be caught unawares again, as happened



stricting certain age groups and those with comorbid conditions. Unfortunately, these very same rules have been blatantly ignored and brazenly flouted by some of the very authorities that enacted them. There is a glaring disconnect between what the government prescribes for religious places of worship and what some of its functionaries actually practice on the ground.

Being a staunch social and religious conservative, it is difficult for me to voice grievances against what the Bible describes as "the governing authorities ... which God has established." But as a person with eyes, ears and social media access, one cannot ignore the danger signs of a population resentful of this inconsistent application of laws and rules. There are memes and slogans in English and in Khasi that the virus apparently operates only in churches and public transport; it does not operate in civil functions and political events.

Memes are the communication tools of this age, that quickly and decisively shape public opinion. Comments on YouTube videos are often more influential than official advisories. Visuals and videos of crowds breaking all norms of physical distancing and masking only reinforce the growing conviction that SOPs apply only in selected premises and not in others. People therefore ask their religious leaders why do we

position. Many religious leaders have worked very hard to convince their flock about SOPs and vaccination. In the process some of us have become unpopular because we are perceived as being over-submissive to our earthly rulers and impervious to our own members' fears about vaccination. Despite their grievances, most of our members have generally remained obedient to their leaders. However, if this continues, it will become very difficult to restrain the upsurge of public opinion against what they perceive to be double standards.

These functionaries may well have good intentions, with the breaking of SOPs being occasional, unintentional slips due to public enthusiasm (although this is difficult to believe). But in a digital world where 'Perception is King,' the sight of high officials addressing massed crowds of tens of thousands certainly undermines the official messaging. Contrast this with couples who have to apply for government permission just for a small gathering of family members at their wedding. Or churches that require official permission for a regular meeting of fifty, physically-distanced people in a spacious church building.

Amidst such disparity, there will naturally be complaints against the arbitrary application of rules in religious functions and the complete absence of such rules in

COVID 19, as we have been since the very beginning. Our position has not changed. So please do not demoralize us with the inconsistent application of SOPs.

The government has also enlisted the help of religious leaders in promoting vaccination, which we announce regularly in our respective religious places of worship. Many religious leaders have done their best to create awareness and allay fears about vaccination. However, there is a point beyond which pushing the issue of vaccines in a worship service becomes counter-productive. Most of our churches are conservative, and the Law of Diminishing Returns operates the moment we digress from traditional Bible messages to public-health messaging.

We understand there are vaccination targets that the government has to achieve, and we appreciate the sincere efforts of our beloved healthcare professionals. However, the task of creating awareness and combating misconceptions is not the primary role of religious organizations. We can certainly help, but the greater responsibility is upon government agencies. It certainly does not help when the actions of their own functionaries dilute the official messaging.

Yes, we are grateful that Meghalaya's daily COVID deaths have fallen to low single digits and the daily infections have drastically reduced from the 800-850 peak

to many of us in the month of May. Tens of thousands of COVID patients suffered tremendously and over a thousand died, leaving behind broken hearts and shattered families. Some of us survived severe COVID pneumonia, I believe with a purpose, to call the general public to guard themselves against this pandemic and to request our political leaders for responsible behaviour. Many people in those huge crowds which you addressed will not be able to afford the expensive treatment in case, God forbid! of severe COVID complications.

There are many good societal and behavioural changes as a result of the pandemic. There are smaller crowds at funerals these days. Some people, especially those with comorbid conditions, now go to pay their respects several days after the funeral. Weddings have become less ostentatious and less expensive. With no pressure to invite hundreds of guests, many couples have been able to afford a proper wedding rather than the unfortunate practice of cohabitation. Churches have successfully innovated with online worship services during the lockdown; they now hold multiple services with lesser congregants in obedience to government SOPs. Perhaps these examples will inspire our political leaders to also innovate amidst this pandemic, to showcase their achievements and present their message without amassing huge crowds.

# For Now, US and China Settle for Cold Peace

By TP Sreenivasan

Having ruled out a new Cold War, President Biden and President Xi seemed to settle for a Cold Peace as they could not manage to resolve the deep differences between them on such issues as Taiwan, Hong Kong and South China sea.

President Biden called for the setting up of 'guardrails' to ensure that the competition between the two countries does not veer into conflict 'whether intended or unintended'.

As for President Xi, the primary need was to increase communication and cooperation. President Xi harped on equality between the two countries, as though they could build a G-2 to control the world till such time that one of them gained the upper hand.

The surprising Joint Statement issued on the side of COP26 to pledge cooperation in dealing with climate change smacked of a G-2 approach to global issues. As the world's two largest economies and permanent members of the UN Security Council, China and the United States should build cooperation through better communication.

"A sound and steady China-US relationship" is needed 'for safeguarding a peaceful and stable international environment,' Mr Xi said. The virtual meeting took place days after the adoption of a historic resolution of the plenum of

in Taiwan clearly favours complete independence.

President Biden raised US concerns about human rights abuses in Hong Kong and against Uyghurs in the north-west region of Xinjiang, which China sees as US of meddling in its domestic affairs. On trade, Mr Biden highlighted the 'need to protect American workers and industries from the PRC's unfair trade and economic practices'.

Mr Xi appears to have made a strong comment on the issue, telling Mr Biden that the US needed to stop 'abusing the concept of national security to oppress Chinese companies'.

The two leaders made no apparent progress on trade issues, but they struck a hopeful note about the potential for future deals. After the meeting, Mr Biden repeated US calls for China to live up to its agreement early last year to import more American goods.

The Chinese statement did not mention the agreement publicly, but it said Mr Xi described the bilateral trade relationship as 'mutually beneficial' while calling for trade not to be politicised.

Against the backdrop of the trade war, the softer tone of the words on trade inspired some optimism, particularly in China, on economic issues. Wide differences between the two countries remain, including



the central committee of the Communist party of China, paving the way for Mr Xi to become leader for life.

His enhanced status in his own country was in contrast to Mr Biden's low popularity ratings in the US. Therefore, a White House spokesperson went out of her way to say that Mr Biden will be speaking from a position of strength after months of rebuilding alliances with other democracies to contain China.

The meeting is 'an opportunity to set the terms of the competition with China' and to insist the leadership in Beijing 'play by the rules of the road'.

The major issue of contention was expected to be Taiwan, in the context of intensified Chinese military activities near Taiwan in recent years. The United States supports Taiwan's self-defence, but is ambiguous about whether it would intervene to help directly. Mr Biden was expected to be very direct on this matter with Mr Xi. China sees Taiwan as a breakaway province to be reunified with the mainland one day.

The US has a one China policy, but it has pledged to help Taiwan defend itself in the event of a Chinese assault on Taiwan. The White House said Mr Biden 'strongly opposes unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait'. Mr Xi minced no words when he told Mr Biden that any intervention in Taiwan will be like playing with fire.

He made it quite clear that reunification of Taiwan with the mainland was a dream of all the Chinese, though he should be aware of the opinion of China. The ruling party

about the commitments the two sides made in ending the trade war.

Even with the interpreters taking half the time, (the interpretation was not simultaneous) the two leaders spoke for nearly two hours and the atmosphere appeared to be cordial enough to cover vast areas.

The leaders waving to each other on television screens appeared comic according to a tweet by Dhruv Jaishankar, which went viral in twitterdom. This was a far cry from the shouting match in Alaska between senior representatives of the two countries. A genuine attempt was made to reset relations in a positive way, signalling a stepping back from the brink of conflict, much to the relief of the world.

With the war clouds clearing, it appears that the value of shares of weapon manufacturers is already dropping. The signal of peace, even if it is cold, is welcome. India is still in the process of figuring out the likely course of US-China relations.

The news of the Chinese suspension of disengagement in Ladakh may not have come up in the conversation, but China should be aware that the peace they are seeking should also include peace along the Line of Actual Control.

In this context, China should also be aware that, as a member of the Quad and a major defence partner of the US, India has an important strategic partnership with the US.

(Ambassador T P Sreenivasan (IFS 1967) is former Ambassador of India and Governor for India of the IAEA).

### Letters to the Editor

## Unfortunate & unprecedented road accident.

Editor,

While extending my deepest condolences to the families of the three who died in the terrible accident at Pommura, as well as prayers for speedy recovery of those injured, I must say that this accident is unprecedented in the history of traffic deaths anywhere in the world. I say 'unprecedented' because it occurred on the left track with head on collision at high speed. In our country the rule for driving is "Keep Left." With the drivers at present in no mood to adhere to laws and matters made worse by too few Traffic Police force, driving whether on highways or city lanes proves a dangerously confusing exercise. This is my fear about the highway NH 6 from Lad Umroi to Ratacherra - a road with no central divider and which I had raised in this paper. The feeble implementation of driving laws along with

modern driving mentality (when life weighs less than a feather), makes such highways without divider, a daily death stretch.

What happens in our city is no different. As a matter of fact, it's worse as there are three rules viz 'Keep Left,' 'Keep Right' and 'Keep Centre' (for oldies flanked on left and right and wondering at this new world of driving). The only saving grace is that in Shillong city, speed is reduced to less than 5Kmph. Of course our traffic police do try their best to blow their whistles non-stop, without any whistle allowance. The Mawryngkneng- Ratacherra stretch resembles these city lanes, but what makes the traffic conveniently slow are the pot holes that form the lakes. This does something to save lives. On the other hand slow drive is a bliss as the result is long life.

Some years ago while the National Highway from Shillong to Tura was being constructed, there was a report that the Union Minister of Transport Nitin Gadkari had floated the idea of a

speed governor for trucks adjusted at 40 Km/h (the system in the past). But whether it was shelved or hushed conveniently, I can't say. Technically, this is the reason why from Upper Shillong to Tura the highway built by NHAI possesses no super elevation (from Umshyrypi bridge to Upper Shillong, made by the British) as well as no transition curves to ease the steering on sharp corners. And the life span of tyres is halved. Till date around twenty small trucks like the TATA 709 or 407 had overturned in curves bereft of the above devices. I questioned the PWD on this matter but the reply was they were not part of the work. This is the reason why Sumos take more than 3 hours to reach Nongstoin from Shillong, a distance they comfortably covered in two 2 hours in the past. And let me tell readers that for petrol-run vehicles equipped with modern computerised fuel injection system, it is very easy to install plus warning signals to alert drivers.

So with our daily news over a cop of tea it would

be highly appreciated if the Government of the day ensures that speed governors are fitted on every vehicle. With this, the need of CCTV will be redundant especially since in India the rear number plates are cunningly concealed in spite of smart phone technology to do the reporting. We can also do away with personnel manning the roads with speed radars and motor bikes to catch the speeding culprits. And this would also deter the cruel driver from repeating their acts. Though accident cases are filed in the court, we seldom hear of any punishment. More saddening is that today the Accident Tribunal of the Assam days is no longer used. This had helped to some extent to help the family which had lost its bread earning member.

Once again my deepest of condolences to the bereaved families. This is a time when our pen appears too weak and unworthy to express such tragic a loss.

Yours etc.,  
James Kharmil  
Shillong 1

## Critical levels of air pollution

Editor,

The Supreme Court's emphasis on "immediate response" in dealing with air pollution in New Delhi indicates the gravity of the issue. Bold and urgent measures need to be taken to restore normalcy. Although lockdowns and work from home policy may help combat air pollution to some extent, such measures are insufficient.

It must be understood that all means of livelihood cannot be carried out from home. Such people will be exposed to toxic air. While closing of schools and banning construction work may improve the situation to a certain extent, bolder steps need to be taken to tackle the issue. Given that lockdowns have led to catastrophic consequences in India, all aspects must be explored before imposing lockdowns. As lockdowns adversely affect the unorganized sector, the interests of the sector must be safeguarded. Although

the SC had stressed upon the need to curb vehicular and industrial emissions, it is important to identify the industries, plants and vehicles that need to be stopped.

It is a fact that implementation of strict measures is a hard task. Unless there is coordination of different sections of government, implementation of such policies would not be successful. The traffic police must take strict action to get rid of very old and unsafe vehicles. Industries and plants that cause very high pollution must be identified and their working must be stopped. For this, reliable data and rules are required. In fact, concerted efforts of all involved such as the central and state governments, judiciary, municipal bodies and law enforcing agencies are required to restore safe air quality levels.

Yours etc.,  
Venu G S,  
Kollam

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

"All growth depends upon activity. There is no development physically or intellectually without effort, and effort means work."

— Calvin Coolidge

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 99 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2021

### Promising the moon

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi has asked fugitive economic offenders, of the likes of Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi, to return to the country and stressed that his government is making all-out efforts in this direction. The PM has also claimed his government has pooled back some Rs 5 lakh crore of money the defaulters had taken away from banks when they scooted from the scene in recent years. The PM's statement came at a symposium with the title, 'Build Synergy for Seamless Credit Flow and Economic Growth' and must be taken at its face value. Yet, the misgivings are very much there when it comes to saving Indian banks from bad loans, which were of the order of Rs 10 lakh crore five years ago. The problem has been addressed only in small part. Banks that fell on bad times due to such indulgences could not stand on their own and have been merged into new entities. In the long term, how the national economy will be impacted by such indulgences of big guns is anybody's guess.

Notably, Prime Minister Modi keeps drawing flak from the Opposition for his failure to fulfil the promise he made during his 2014 general election campaign – that he would get back the money looted by those who defrauded the banks, went abroad and parked their money in tax havens. This, it turns out, was easier said than done. Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi, as also many other businessmen have been fighting back the Centre's attempts to get them back to India, and they have the luxury of using their huge financial assets to influence courts or turn the legal tide in favour of them through multiple means. The Indian investigating agencies, like the Enforcement Directorate and the CBI, have cut a sorry figure too in respect of their failed efforts to get such sharks back to India to face the law. The businessmen are, understandably, smarter than the officials and have a stronger will to outwit the establishment.

The Prime Minister stated that "we relied on policies and law as also diplomatic channels to get them back." The proof of the pudding is in its eating. The results are more important than claims. The PM's promise in 2014 was not only to get back the money funnelled abroad but also to put this money into the bank accounts of India's poor. The credibility of politicians' promises is always in doubt during election campaigns. But, those who lead the nation from the front would do well to desist from promising the moon.

### Letters to the Editor

#### On air pollution

Editor,

Apropos the letter, 'Critical levels of air pollution,' by Venu G.S (ST 18 Nov, 2021) I have an important point to make. In Delhi, the AQI has dipped to such an alarming state that the Supreme Court had to act. Now the farmers in Punjab can have a sigh of relief as the apex court rejected the idea that stubble burning in their land contributed to 40% of the present pollution. The SC says that stubble burning does not even contribute to single digit pollution.

This periodic problem in the capital is actually geographical in nature as it occurs during the Diwali season and extends to January thereby affecting morning flights. That coal fired plants would have to reduce their dependence on coal is according to me not right. By this I do not advocate that India should delay the time for letting go of the use of coal by 2070. Around two million lives depend on coal even with scientific mining, but in the meantime they could be employed in the green energy sector if we really

have to harness the 7,500 Km coastal belt from Bay of Bengal to Gujrat near the Arabian sea. And being close to the equator, we could reap the solar energy of 5600 trillion MW/hr per year.

The write-up also mentions old vehicles which had worried many vehicle users across the country. At one time scrapping of 'old vehicles' was on the centre's list. Let us not lose sight of the engineering fact that the age of the vehicle be it car or truck does not depend on years of registration. A car bought after the emission norms imposed, in the 2000's might have been bought by someone with a loan. They use it for going to office, school duty and some short trips. Per day they drive 40 Km, so for 24 working days and school days per month they would have driven 960 Km. For tourist vehicles, from Shillong to Borjhar Airport and back the mileage is 300 X 28 = 8400 Km per month!

Another controversy that crops up in India is that the odometer is never sealed (the mechanical one). So it is tampered to read say 20,000 Km when in fact it had done 2 lakh Kms. In other countries where companies like

Anyone who is not Shillong-bound and steps out to visit the villages of Meghalaya knows just how wretched the roads are. How I wish the Chief Minister travels to all these places with decrepit roads as he is now doing by visiting parts of West Khasi Hills (Wahkaji and Nongkhnum) among other forgotten destinations which are not attractive enough for tourists and are therefore left to wallow in their backwardness. The Chief Minister should now take the bumpy ride from Mawlyndep to Mawmaram to understand the plight of people there. For one, ordinary citizens don't have luxury vehicles to cushion the bumps on their delicate backs and spines caused by what's left of roads that are eaten up by the heavy rains because they don't comply to specifications. Reason? The minister, engineer/s contractor have to necessarily get their share of the amount allotted for constructing the road. Open deal; no questions asked!

When one speaks to the villagers one realizes just how unaware they are of their rights. They believe that after they have voted a person, it is the responsibility of that "representative to ensure they have good roads, electricity, health care facilities and water supply – the key necessities for anyone to stay alive and pursue a livelihood. Meghalaya is inherently an agrarian state but how can the farmers' produce be brought to the open markets without a road? Hence farmers now prefer to sell their products to buyers that come to the farm gate but who also decide the prices. Often the farmers don't even get back their labour cost and capital investment in seeds, fertilisers etc.

Some farmers who have discovered the agency of "VOICE" and have developed the confidence to talk to Agricultural officers as equals and not be talked down to have benefited from that interface. But such are too few to make a difference by cutting the bureaucratic red tape. However, despite the somewhat gloomy picture that emerges when one thinks of rural Meghalaya and how distant the people are from the governance dispensing mechanisms, there are some bright sparks that give hope. I am fortunate to have met a few of such technocrats whose heart is with the people. Recently I traveled to Mawlyndep where the fish farmers were learning new fish-rearing techniques. To give them the basic awareness on the 'Biofloc' fish rearing tech-

# Loss of voice is loss of power

By Patricia Mukhim

nology is a young officer of the Fisheries Department. Listening to her animated conversation on a range of issues that beset the fish farmers was educative. The young lady had previously worked in the National Fisheries Development Board in the Central Government but wanted to return to the state to help develop the fisheries sector which has vast scope in Meghalaya, especially in areas close to the Umiam Lake which is now a natural reservoir both for Agriculture and Pisciculture since the soil left behind by the receding waters in winter is very fertile and supports the growth of winter crops.

Later when the young officer was speaking to the

is Meghalaya's most distressing predicament. No MLA resides in the Constituency unless he or she is from one of the constituencies of Shillong and its suburbs. Of the 7 MLAs who represent the constituencies of Shillong and its suburbs 6 live within their constituencies; one lives in another constituency while the rest of the 54 MLAs representing distant rural constituencies all live in Shillong (they include the 24 MLAs from Garo Hills). Whenever villagers need to make a representation about a road, electricity health or education problem they have to spend one whole day or more to come and meet their MLA/minister in Shillong. Should it always be like this?



trainees, she was crystal clear, concise and articulate. She elicited questions from the participants and answered them with patience. Her demeanour was not that of a know-it-all government official – an attitude that is very off-putting. I learnt

*"The Chief Minister should now take the bumpy ride from Mawlyndep to Mawmaram to understand the plight of people there. For one, ordinary citizens don't have luxury vehicles to cushion the bumps on their delicate backs and spines caused by what's left of roads that are eaten up by the heavy rains because they don't comply to specifications."*

along with the fish farmers that the Biofloc fish rearing technique can be carried out in a smaller area and in a controlled environment and this was most suitable for those that have no land for digging ponds to rear fish.

But let me get back to the point I started with – the loss of voice of the rural folks. For some reason the MLA of a constituency can get away with rare visits if he/she finds time from his/her more pressing business of self-aggrandisement. This

Scheme is what ensures that MLAs continue to be voted back because people are so ignorant of the power they can wield and because they believe they are subservient to and obliged to the MLA for having given them Rs 5000-10,000 before the elections.

Our people also lack the imagination to think big for themselves and their children. Their imagination is stuck in a little whirlpool which traps them in poverty because they don't believe they have the power to change things or to

even speak up. The only ones who speak up closer to the elections are rabble-rousing wannabe MLAs whose only stratagem has been to create fear psychosis in the electorate but will not want to see them empowered enough to start asking searching questions.

Questioning is our birthright and contrary to the inhibiting Khasi culture which is hierarchical and patriarchal (women are not supposed to speak before a gathering of male members), questioning is the only way in which we can hold our MLAs/ministers accountable. They cannot talk down to us and pretend they know everything. All of us are vested with the same amount of wisdom and common sense as the MLAs and ministers are. But for this to happen we need to have selfless youth leaders who don't belong to this or that pressure group but who feel a genuine sense of concern for the people in the rural outback and are inspired enough to work with them and to empower them with "VOICE."

How can an elected representative be absent from his constituency for a full five years or come there like a migratory bird only when invited as chief guest while the rest of the time is spent enjoying the thrills of a five-star existence, riding flamboyantly on the most expensive vehicles that only the well-heeled can afford to flaunt. It is also the fatal flaw of people to elect someone from a wealthy family who does not know what it is to walk in the common man's shoes; who lives not in a 'home' but a mansion; who does not know what it is to walk on a road strewn with boulders and pebbles or to be a pregnant woman in labour and be taken to hospital on that bumpy road to the point of losing the child due to the interminable jerks! That's how tough life is for the average woman in Meghalaya living in the peripheries beyond the state capital.

Should we allow the votes in 2023 to be wasted in these self-centred, self-serving "representatives" who are more interested in promoting their own and their family members' business interests. Enough is enough. We want motorable roads, a reliable water supply, electricity and healthcare. Thousands of crores of rupees have been sunk into this state in the past 49 years. Its time to take stock of things and to seek an account from every MLA past and present.

We need a new consciousness and a new youth group that is not extractive and extortionist in its methods. That alone can save Meghalaya!

## Democratic norms bypassed in extending tenure of two chiefs Ordinance on eve of Parliament session a disrespect to house

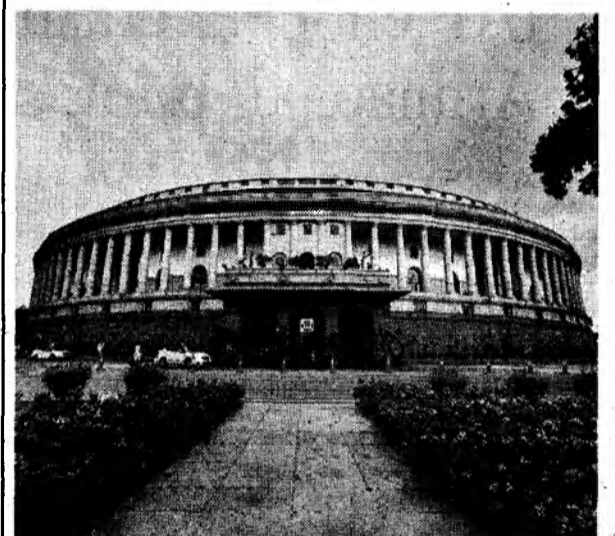
By Krishna Jha

The year is almost at its end. Republic Day would bring back to us again the celebrations of democracy. As we revise our pledge on January 26 to abide by our Constitution, protect it and move ahead, the Government has been busy taking decisions and passing ordinances to subvert it. It has extended the tenure of the directors of the CBI and ED, and made it from two years to five years. With a nod from the President, the ordinances got clearance. The Parliament session is only few days away but the possibility of deterrents coming from the opposition was obviously not acceptable to the government, hence the hurry.

Both the agencies are in the hands of the government. The step has been interpreted as an attack on the objectivity and freedom of probe agencies. The move has also been seen as taken in a

tional cases". The judiciary is not going to come to terms with the changes mutely, ordinances will be opposed in the Parliament and also taken up in the apex court. Amending the Acts through Ordinances will not obliterate the judgement of the Supreme Court. The judgement is law under Article 141.

It has been announced by the Ministry of Law and Justice that the two ordinances – the Delhi Special Police (Establishment) Ordinance, 2021 and the Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Ordinance, 2021 – will come into effect immediately. There has also been an amendment in the Delhi Special Police (Establishment) Ordinance, in which the ministry has introduced a change in the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946. A clause inserted states: "Provided that the period for which the Director holds the office on



hurry to extend the tenure of ED director S K Mishra that was scheduled to end on November 17. It is also seen as subversion of freedom of the key agencies as the government has usurped the right to take decision to extend the tenure of the chiefs. Earlier the centre could extend the tenure for a year for three consecutive times. The ordinances amend the Delhi Police Special Establishment Act, which is the parent law for the CBI, and the Central Vigilance Act, which covers the appointment of the ED director. "Whereas the Parliament is not in session and the President is satisfied that circumstances exist which render it necessary for him to take immediate action," the ordinances say.

The term for SK Mishra

his initial appointment may, in public interest, on recommendation of the Committee under sub-section (1) of section 4A and for the reasons to be recorded in writing, be extended up to one year at a time: Provided further that no such extension shall be granted after the completion of a period of five years in total including the period mentioned in the initial appointment."

In the same context there is also another move that suggests that the Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Ordinance, 2021 will introduce an amendment to the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003. Here, the new clause states that "provided that the period for which the Director of Enforcement

*"The Parliament session is only few days away but the possibility of deterrents coming from the opposition was obviously not acceptable to the government, hence the hurry."*

was to be over in 2020 but was extended for one year. The step was termed as "exceptional" and also "unprecedented". Now the period of full five years has been granted by an ordinance. As the term was extended, the Centre justifying the step, said in the ordinance itself, "The President of India is pleased to approve the modification in the earlier order dated November 19, 2018, appointing Shri Sanjay Kumar Mishra as director of enforcement in the Enforcement Directorate." A 1984-batch Indian Revenue Service officer of the Income Tax cadre, Mishra, now 61 years old, was appointed the ED chief on November 19, 2018. The ordinances say "no such extension shall be granted after the completion of a period of five years in total including the period mentioned in the initial appointment".

The move has also caused an apprehension about the future of democracy since it has sidelined the recent judgment by the Supreme Court bench that had pointedly said in the case linked to the extension of Mishra's tenure that such an extension can only be "in rare and excep-

holds the office on his initial appointment may, in public interest, on the recommendation of the Committee under clause (a) and for reasons to be recorded in writing, be extended up to one year at a time: Provided further that no such extension shall be granted after the completion of a period of five years in total including the period mentioned in the initial appointment."

The ordinances have not been a rare incident. The Centre has been outreaching and making such changes earlier too. Unlike the CBI director, the head of the ED is not selected by the committee consisting of the prime minister, leader of opposition and chief justice of India. However, the recommendation of extension of the term of ED director comes from a committee comprising the chief vigilance commissioner, vigilance commissioner, home secretary and the secretaries of the Department of Personnel and Training and Revenue. By extending the ED director's tenure through an ordinance, the Union government has bypassed this committee. (IPA Service)

and trucks that load according to factory specification with MOT 25% concession. And we at times are at the mercy of the State Pollution Board. Yes, the state-run testing agency may be fine in their job but with only two SPSBs in the state, what about the private vehicles not subjected to surprise checking by the govt?

So while talking about old vehicles, especially the scrapping threat, let those in power realise that in our country there are 97% poor as against 3% rich, the poor cannot afford to buy vehicles the way the 3% do. For now, our public who are worried about scrapping of 20 year old vehicles (Euro or Bharat complied) can rest assured that we are defended by law.

Yours etc.,  
B.Lyngdoh Mawnei,  
Shillong 3

#### Of sexual crimes

Editor,

The Supreme Court must be commended for setting aside a Mumbai High Court ruling that held that "skin-to-skin contact" between an accused person and a minor

was necessary to establish an act done with sexual intent. It is worrisome that many offenders in sexual crimes against children get off scot-free due to lack of evidence, faulty prosecution or wrong judgements. When courts pronounce wrong verdicts in crimes against children, the hapless victims are left without any choice. As a consequence, people lose trust in courts. It must be noted that in many countries, sexual crimes against children are strictly dealt with and severe punishment is meted out to offenders. In contrast, in India such offenders do not get severe punishment. Despite the fact that capital punishment has been introduced for raping children, in most cases, such punishments are reduced to life imprisonment. A wrong move from the side of the judiciary will send a wrong message to society. Offenders will take advantage of it and it will lead to an increase in such crimes.

It is a fact that over the years, there has been a substantial rise in the number of sexual crimes against children in the country. Unless strict punitive measures are taken, such crimes cannot be stopped. Sexual offences against children strip them of all dignity. When courts allow offenders to escape by trivializing their crimes, children are denied justice and deprived of their rights. Children subjected to sexual abuses develop psychological problems. It adversely affects their education and overall development. As they are the country's future citizens, it is the responsibility of all concerned to ensure their well-being.

Courts must always deal with crimes against children with utmost care and seriousness. It must be noted that even a wrong touch is equal

to an act done with sexual intent. It is worrisome that many offenders in sexual crimes against children get off scot-free due to lack of evidence, faulty prosecution or wrong judgements. When courts pronounce wrong verdicts in crimes against children, the hapless victims are left without any choice. As a consequence, people lose trust in courts. It must be noted that in many countries, sexual crimes against children are strictly dealt with and severe punishment is meted out to offenders. In contrast, in India such offenders do not get severe punishment. Despite the fact that capital punishment has been introduced for raping children, in most cases, such punishments are reduced to life imprisonment. A wrong move from the side of the judiciary will send a wrong message to society. Offenders will take advantage of it and it will lead to an increase in such crimes.

Yours etc.,  
Venu G.S,  
Kollam

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"To find relief in what has been,  
we must make ourselves eternal."

-- Violette Leduc

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 100 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2021

### Leaders or followers?

THE statement of Mawlai legislator PT Sawmie that Government should focus on the Inner Line Permit (ILP) rather than on railways is indicative of how populism has wrecked development plans in Meghalaya and the North Eastern region. ILP is a populist demand not based on any rationale, except an irrational fear of the outsider in a world where economics transcends all boundaries. The ILP is an emotional appeal made to voters who are fed on the paranoia that they are incapable of competing in an open space and therefore need a protective shield. But how long can populism be allowed to decide the fate of this state? How can a few people decide what's good for the entire population of Meghalaya, including those that import goods from outside the state and pay a substantial sum for transportation? There is a limit to the politics of representation. While contesting the need for trains in Meghalaya those who have a direct stake in transportation of goods have never been consulted.

The greatest advantage of railway transport is that it is the most dependable mode of transport as it is the least affected by weather conditions such as rains, fog etc. compared to other modes of transport. It is also better organized than any other form of transport. It has fixed routes and schedules. Its service is more certain, uniform and regular as compared to other modes of transport. Its speed over long distances is more than any other mode of transport, except airways. Thus, it is the best choice for long distance traffic at a reduced cost. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA) trains are among the most efficient and lowest emitting modes of transport. According to the IEA's new report focusing on the opportunities it offers for energy and the environment in particular, urban and high-speed rail hold "major promise to unlock substantial benefits", the report says, which include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, congestion and air pollution.

Railway transport is economical, quicker and best suited for carrying heavy and bulky goods over long distances. It is a cheaper mode of transport as compared to other modes of transport. Every increase in railway traffic is followed by a decrease in the average cost. Railway is the safest form of transport. The chances of accidents and breakdowns of railways are minimum as compared to other modes of transport. If Meghalaya has to create its engine of progress it cannot be held to ransom by vested interest groups. Those who are elected need to have a vision and political courage to push through schemes that benefit the people of Meghalaya.

# A strategic turnaround on farm laws

By Jagdish Rattanani

There are many ways to see the sudden change of the Prime Minister's position on the farm laws that have led to farmer protests for more than a year now. By any account, the change from a hard-line position that we'll do anything but repeal these laws to an apology for these laws marks a dramatic turn of events. There is much celebration that the Prime Minister had to give-in in the face of resistance, and who better to teach him a lesson or two in humility than the hardy farmers of India who could see through a game in farmland corporatisation that they despised. In a bitterly divided nation, expect reactions to follow known political positions. It will take some time for the full import of the action to be understood and analysed.

Yet, a few narratives cannot be missed. The action comes close to key State elections in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. The former has been the central arena of protests against the farm laws and has already cost the BJP a political ally. New allies are waiting but won't shake hands till the hated laws are out of the way. In Uttar Pradesh, there have been signals that the laws will extract a political cost. Both State elections will determine a lot for the political landscape of India, given their size and significance. It is impossible to miss the case that this is a government giving in not because it has changed its stance or position but because it is now unwilling to pay the political price for its actions. This means that the BJP has led a strategic withdrawal to get something much more valuable to the party. The announcement on the Holy Day of Guru Nanak Jayanti will further be seen in this light, not dissimilar to the manner in which Modi suddenly visited the Rakabganj Gurudwara in Delhi in December 2020 in an attempt seen as a way to appease agitating farmers, many Sikhs among them, without giving anything in return. There, the 'granthi' reading the 'paath' preached, even as the Prime Minister bowed, that there was no use visiting a holy place without a change of heart. The trouble with an event management star is that everything begins to be seen in a narrow light of projections and imagery and transactions. Even a serious change of heart is difficult to

accept as such. Given that, it is pretty clear that there is no change of heart here. In his address, the Prime Minister made it clear: "I want to say sincerely that perhaps there must have

large corporates. These are important questions and the last word has not yet been written on the desperate attempt to corporatise large swathes of rural India. If the withdrawal is strategic, and if



could the PM on a backfoot say. We could grant him an honourable exit and let that statement be. Yet, the Prime minister

*"In one way, this is expedient, even dishonest. But equally, a finely tuned ear to the mood of the people is an important lesson that many political parties now almost in the wilderness can learn. This does not mean breaking on principles, and make no mistake that nothing in the thinking of the BJP leadership has changed on the matter."*

ter is saying, literally, that the farmers did not get the "truth", whatever that means. Is he then saying that the farmers of India stuck with the "lies" fed to them and the entire government machinery

and take hard action where required to protect its votes and to consolidate its rise to power. The longer the BJP stays, the more of an imprint its brand of politics leaves on the nation, and this is what the BJP wants to achieve. What is the value of three farm laws in the face of an overwhelming majority in UP and Punjab? The latter gives the party a license to do much more, possibly change the very constitutional base on which the nation has been built since independence. So, the laws can go if the votes are banked. The recent warning by Meghalaya Governor Satya Pal Malik that BJP leaders can't enter many villages in UP and that the BJP won't win the elections if the farm laws stay had therefore been taken seriously by the party.

In one way, this is expedient, even dishonest. But equally, a finely tuned ear to the mood of the people is an important lesson that many political parties now almost in the wilderness can learn. This does not mean breaking on principles, and make no mistake that nothing in the thinking of the BJP leadership has changed on the matter. But an active party machinery, thinking and responding on issues and how they might play-out, with a clear goal to electoral victory to enable it build on its mission, is a lesson not to be missed.

There could also be unexpected surprises for the BJP, given the force and time it spent to push the laws. That lost goodwill can still spring some ugly dividends. It is not out of order that the Bhartiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait has said the agitation will not be immediately withdrawn, something the Prime Minister asked for. After having struggled for over a year, with several hundred farmer lives lost and abuse heaped on protestors, including the attempt by the BJP to label them as terrorists, it will take some time for the farmers to go back. In early remarks, Tikait has said they would want the action to happen in Parliament before formally withdrawing the agitation. Today, it is the farmers who have won and it is not easy to say what this victory means for farmers as a political force like never before.

(The writer is a journalist and a faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

## India needs to adopt smart agriculture for productivity

By K R Sudhaman

On a day when Prime Minister Narendra Modi rightly repealed the three draconian farm laws to prevent a political snowball in the ensuing assembly elections. It is worthwhile to ponder over how to make Indian agriculture smart now that the controversial laws have been withdrawn.

It may be a political victory for opposition but is expected to end the prolonged farm agitation, at times violent, with repeal of the three contentious farm laws - Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act and

Perhaps experts could look into the matter and come out with a smart solution.

If India could replicate what Noble laureate Norman Borlaug did in Mexico for Green Revolution to fructify through adoption of hybrid wheat in Punjab and Haryana, why not replicate now the efforts of Uruguay to make India the food bowl of the world. Verghese Kurian's efforts in Gujarat brought about White Revolution with practically all states replicating the Amul model. But in several other areas like oilseeds, pulses, India is far behind.

The Uruguay model is worth emulating. To protect



Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 These were enacted by Parliament in September last year amidst widespread protest from opposition parties.

The green revolution of 1960s ensured India became surplus in food grains production and the country no longer had famine. No deaths were reported due to food non-availability even during the difficult COVID times when many people lost jobs. But what has not happened in India so far is an increase in average productivity of Indian agriculture to global level so that the country becomes the food bowl of the world.

Indian farming has come a long way and today India is among the top nations in rice and wheat production, largest producer of milk, fruits, vegetables, pulses, sugar and so on. But the problem is that though India has pockets where productivity is highest comparable to global level, the average yield for most crops is among the lowest in the world despite having the most fertile land both in the Gangetic plains and southern peninsula. There are many reasons for it, including fragmentation of holding, poor techniques, un-optimal use of water, non-availability of quality seeds and fertilisers.

The average land holding of most of the poor farmers is less than 2 acres. India may have the largest irrigated land in the world, which is closely followed by China and is more than double that of irrigated land available in United States. But the problem is still a little over half of India's farm land is rain-dependent. Dry land farming through drip irrigation and sprinkler irrigation methods have not caught on substantially barring a few states like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. China has only one seventh of its huge land mass as arable, unlike India where majority of its land is arable. Yet China's average productivity is one of the highest in the world as compared to India's, one of the lowest. Nearly 50 per cent of Indian population is still dependent on farming for livelihood but agriculture accounted for only 15 per cent of GDP resulting in low income in rural India and high rate of under-employment. So where have Indian policy makers gone wrong leading to this kind of paradoxical situation? In one word the answer is Indian agriculture needed to be made smart. We may have smart city projects but so far there is no plan evolved to make Indian farming smart.

milch animals and improve productivity of farm products Uruguay has done scientific study for over a decade using data collected with the help of drones and satellites. Gou rakshaks would do well to adopt the Latin American way of protecting cows so as to raise farm income manifold for poor farmers.

Uruguay is a country in which on an average every farmer has 4 cows and is in number one position worldwide. It is a country with only 33 lakh people but has 1.2 crore cows. Every cow has an electronic chip on its ear. Through the electronic chip, the owner can track and watch the movement while the farmer is sitting inside a machine to harvest the crop. The screen in front of his harvester not only keeps track of the cow, but also provides data on his crop as well as the cow. The farmer can self-analyse the yield per square metre through the data collected.

Through this smart agriculture, the farmer has not only ensured optimum use of his farm land to get maximum yield but also keep and get maximum milk yield. As a result the productivity and income of farmers have gone up manifold. In 2005 Uruguay's 33 lakh people produced food grains for its 90 lakh people. Today Uruguay produces food grains for 2.8 crore people and the surplus is exported. Behind this success, was a decade long study by 500 agricultural engineers, who were hired to oversee the whole farming by keeping an eye on the farmer's activity and the cows with the help of drones and satellites. Based on their study through the data collected, the engineers determined the optimal farming method for grain and milk production. Today all these farmers who were at subsistence level earn much more. The minimum income of a farmer in Uruguay now is \$1,90,000 annually, which is equivalent to earning Rs 1,25,000 per month.

One only hopes farm experts in India too do a similar study to make Indian agriculture smart for poor farmers so that their income not only doubles but increases manifold. At present India's farm exports accounted for only \$40 billion annually. In the next few years it is proposed to be taken up to \$100 billion and perhaps to \$200 billion in a decade or so. The gou rakshaks could also employ scientists to improve milk productivity by proper monitoring of cows. Many cows in India die after consuming plastic waste and this too could be tackled through data analysis. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### More flights to & from Shillong Airport

Editor,  
It was certainly a heart-warming news to read in your esteemed newspaper (ST Nov 19, 2021) that Shillong - Dimapur flight will commence from November 22. Thanks to Alliance Air, Airport Authority of India, Govt of Meghalaya and Govt of India, Shillong Airport at present is already connected with Kolkata, New Delhi, Imphal, Agartala, Dibrugarh and Silchar.

While acknowledging the initiative taken by the Union Government under RCS Udan Scheme, I would like to invoke upon these agencies and all stakeholders whatsoever that another flight could be easily connected between Shillong Airport and Siliguri (Bagdogra) Airport. This will cater to the needs of a large chunk of passengers travelling to Siliguri and its adjoining areas like Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong, Jalpaiguri, Dooars, Nepal and Bhutan.

Yours etc.  
Madhu Rawat  
Shillong -2

#### Dire need for goods train

Editor  
A survey on various social media platforms will overwhelmingly indicate that the majority of our people favour the railways that is for goods and essentials as a primary initiative. However, the opposition stems from the fact that in spite of the continued demand for implementation of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) this subject has been put on hold. What the majority favour is economic upliftment that would benefit many in the long term. The railways can be said to be the lifeline of this nation's economic development and also a public transporter. The coming of the railhead for goods and services will not only give direct and indirect employment but also support the livelihoods of many of our entrepreneurs, farmers, artisans, local industries and other sectors. The taxes paid and levied on road transport has a detrimental effect on prices of essential commodities and in turn causes a stress on the common people. We have seen how the pandemic had wreaked havoc on livelihoods and necessities for food. Per-

haps those who shout for the Jaibynriew should stop shedding crocodile tears. Rather they should be more pragmatic in their approach for an equitable society.

Yours etc...  
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar,  
Shillong

#### Non-functioning electric crematorium

Editor,  
The only electric crematorium which we have in Shillong has not been working for the past three months because of major repairs. This has caused immense problem for the people. On discreet inquiry with the staff running the crematorium, it is learnt that the repair works have been completed but for want of the permission from the Managing Committee, the crematorium is not operational.

From past observations, it is found that death rates go up during winter months. Due to non-functioning of the electric crematorium, people are forced to cremate the dead bodies of their deceased family members either in the Gorkha Cremation Ghat or in the adjacent

Cremation Ghat managed by Marwari Community. Dead bodies being brought to these two cremation ghats have increased. At present, there are only two firewood suppliers for these two ghats. There is a limit beyond which these suppliers can meet the demand for firewood. As we all know, firewood is scarce these days and the source from which these suppliers are bringing firewood for us is depleting. This has caused a lot of problems for the personnel managing these two ghats which are somehow fulfilling the needs of the people but this cannot continue. The cremations ghat run by the Marwari Committee has started availing help for firewood from the Gorkha Samsan Ghat. A sort of emergency situation has arisen and we can only imagine how difficult it is going to be to cremate dead bodies.

I fervently appeal to the Managing Committee of the Electric Crematorium to activate their crematorium at the earliest, to mitigate the hardships faced by the people. Till such time, people are also requested to judiciously utilize firewood available at ghats while cremating the mortal remains of their departed dear ones.

Yours etc.,  
K Chettri  
General Secretary  
Gorkha Samsan Ghat,  
Shillong

#### Pakistan gets tough on rapists

Editor,  
With a view to speeding up conviction and imposing tougher sentences in rape cases, Pakistan Parliament has passed a new legislation. Sex offenders convicted of multiple rapes in Pakistan could face chemical castration. The passage of the Bill came in the wake of a public outcry against recent rise in the number of rapes of women and children in the country.

A person subjected to chemical castration is rendered incapable of performing sexual intercourse. It reduces sexual activity. It is a legal form of punishment in several countries. Chemical castration reduces perpetrators' testosterone levels and thereby sex drive is lowered.

A large number of people believe that people who subject women and children to brutal rape and murder must be hanged. On the other hand, hanging is not

an internationally accepted punishment. Even though countries like India have introduced hanging for rape of children, in most cases, offenders get off scot-free. The rise in the number of rapes of women and children in India is alarming. Even in such a situation, severe punishment is not meted out to offenders. Furthermore, inordinate delay in the judicial process adversely affects imposing of tougher sentences. It is generally accepted that severe punishment for rapists will act as a deterrent to other offenders.

True, chemical castration deprives offenders of their rights. On the other hand, considering the brutality of crimes, it is justified. It is imperative that the dignity and rights of women and children are safeguarded. For this, strict punitive measures need to be adopted. Unless the well-being of women and children are ensured, no country can progress.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Kollam

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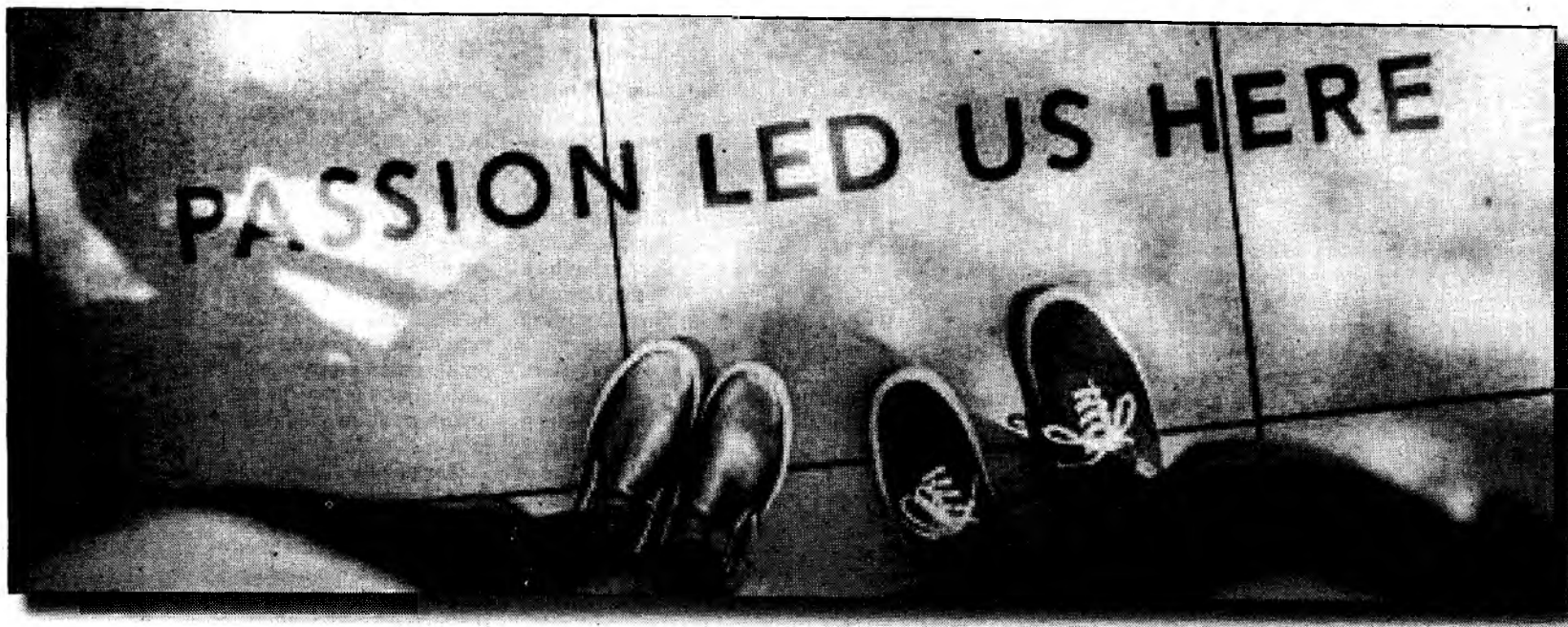
# The tale of the 'COVID Shereroes'

Social Media platform, Twitter, recognises women who championed pandemic relief in India, calling them 'COVID Shereroes'. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Twitter has played a critical role in keeping people connected and amplifying authoritative information from credible sources.

It emerged as a real-time helpline as people supported one another on the service. Among these were many women from different parts of India, representing diverse backgrounds, cultures and languages, who used Twitter effectively to share reliable information and offer support to those in need. To acknowledge the efforts of these women and their contributions to COVID-relief through their online communities, Twitter India and women rights organisation Breakthrough came together to recognise them as 'COVID Shereroes'.

Earlier this year, Twitter India in partnership with Breakthrough (@INBreakthrough) called upon the community to nominate women who made exemplary efforts towards providing support during the pandemic. These were women who used the social media platform to connect people to resources, amplify SOS calls and provide on-ground aid however they could.

Payal Kamat, Public Policy and Government, Twitter India, said, "As Indians came together to deal with the second wave of COVID-19, it was humbling to see women across all walks of life actively taking charge to have good faith public conversation and bring relief to those seeking help. Thanks to the open internet and the power of public conversation, people can create action, and thus we're leaning into that by celebrating these COVID Shereroes. In partnership with Breakthrough, we're proud to recognise these women, and hope that their achievements



inspire many more to emerge as instruments of change."

Sohini Bhattacharya, CEO, Breakthrough Trust, Breakthrough: "Time and again, we've witnessed the strength of community and camaraderie in helping people overcome the worst of adversities. During COVID-19, unprecedented as we call it, humanity was struck in a way that distanced communities themselves. The power of the internet, especially Twitter, is what rescued many of those suffering, and the wave of humanity, kindness and community support that emerged was humbling and inspiring. We saw people going out of their way to connect others with help and resources, and the way some of the women on Twitter utilised their reach and equity on the platform is testimony to their spirit of leadership. It is our honour to be honouring these women and encourage them further as they continue to make society a better place."

After screening through 110 nominated profiles, six women

were featured:

**Arpita Chowdhury, 20, New Delhi:** Arpita is an undergraduate student at the Delhi University, and the founder of Jazbaat Foundation, a Delhi-based project to uplift underprivileged students. To support Covid relief work during the second wave in India, she started the #LetsFightCovid-19 initiative on April 21. As part of the initiative, she created a live database of information around resources, including hospital beds, oxygen supplies, medical aid, and more.

**Fathaheen Misbah, 35, Mysore:** Fathaheen works in IT, but finds her calling in serving humanity and creating a positive change. It was this calling that led her to the forefront of Covid relief. She used her community and reach on Twitter to amplify requests for help, and connect those in need with resources. From arranging blood plasma, to sharing information around availability of beds, drugs and medicines — Fathaheen

was able to bring hope to people. Not only did she get in touch with those seeking support on Twitter, but was also able to reach out to people not on the service and help them find resources.

**Maggie Inbamutiah 45, Bengaluru:** Maggie works extensively across social welfare, diversity and inclusion. She works with Puppatica India to bring Indian stories to life, and also runs a non-profit called Mandram to promote discourses in regional languages in India, as well as an outdoor venture, Happifoot connecting people with nature. Amid Covid-19, she led a team of volunteers in South Bangalore — dealing with more than 40 SOS requests per day. Discovering these requests and SOS calls through Twitter, her team was able to help find a BBMP bed for a crematorium worker; provide access to an EMCO machine for a patient from Ahmedabad with the help of two other NGOs; and help a pregnant woman with Covid-19 find appropriate medical help,

among other achievements.

**Mithila Naik-Satnam, 25, Mumbai:** Mithila is a Communications Consultant from Mumbai, and works with the Charkha Development Communication Network, Delhi on a UNICEF India project. She also volunteers with the Khaana Chahiye Foundation (@khaanachahiye), where she looks at partnerships and digital outreach. Through Twitter, Mithila was able to amplify the work of the Foundation, and reach a wider audience. During the pandemic, she leveraged her digital expertise and the Khaana Chahiye community on the service to help people access beds, medical supplies and oxygen.

**Sabita Chanda, 40, Delhi:** Sabita is a career coach and HR advisor turned humanitarian, who spends her time lending support to people in need. She started the MigrantWorkers Movement, extending food and ration support to over 8000 migrants who were left homeless, often starv-

ing, by the pandemic. She also helped underprivileged children from struggling families gain access to online classes through smartphones and laptops. Her work towards helping people find medical aid, especially that of catering to over 1200 requests for blood plasma, earned her the hat of Plasma Queen. She also worked with state governments in the north-east and Himachal Pradesh to help connect people with medical aid. Dedicated to social welfare, Sabita continues to support people to find access to ration and arrange funds for students seeking admission to schools.

**Seema Mishra, 47, Ghaziabad:** Registrar and Academic Head at ICR ILAM group, Seema is a panel advisor and mentor to various startups. As a passionate humanitarian, Seema founded the Develop India Foundation NGO, and has been working extensively towards education equality, empowerment and environmental causes. During the pandemic, Seema started working with a group of volunteers to provide medical aid to those seeking resources for their family and friends. Along with her team, she connected people to food, blood plasma, and hospital beds by making the most of her network on Twitter. She also helped several stranded migrants find their way back home amidst the nationwide lockdown. Currently, she's working towards creating vaccine awareness and helping combat people's hesitance towards the vaccine. Seema has found appreciation and recognition for her work over the years — being awarded as the 'Influencer of Ghaziabad' for Womenovator — the first virtual global incubator for women. She was also featured in a book, Changemakers, about social impact by 11 inspiring Indian women. (IANSLife)

## Destinations in India for the brave-hearted travellers

India is an incredible melting pot of food, culture, language, and tradition. It is also the land of extreme climatic conditions, countless large and small natural wonders, and breathtaking mountain ranges. However, some destinations can provide you with an adrenaline rush or even send a shiver down your spine.

Why? That's because some are haunted, some are home to unique adventure spots and some are just too deep and dangerous. If you have a keen interest in experiencing thrilling and adventurous travel, perhaps you should consider taking a trip to these locations! While most people try to avoid spooky or dangerous places, there is also a significant portion of people who actively seek out such experiences.

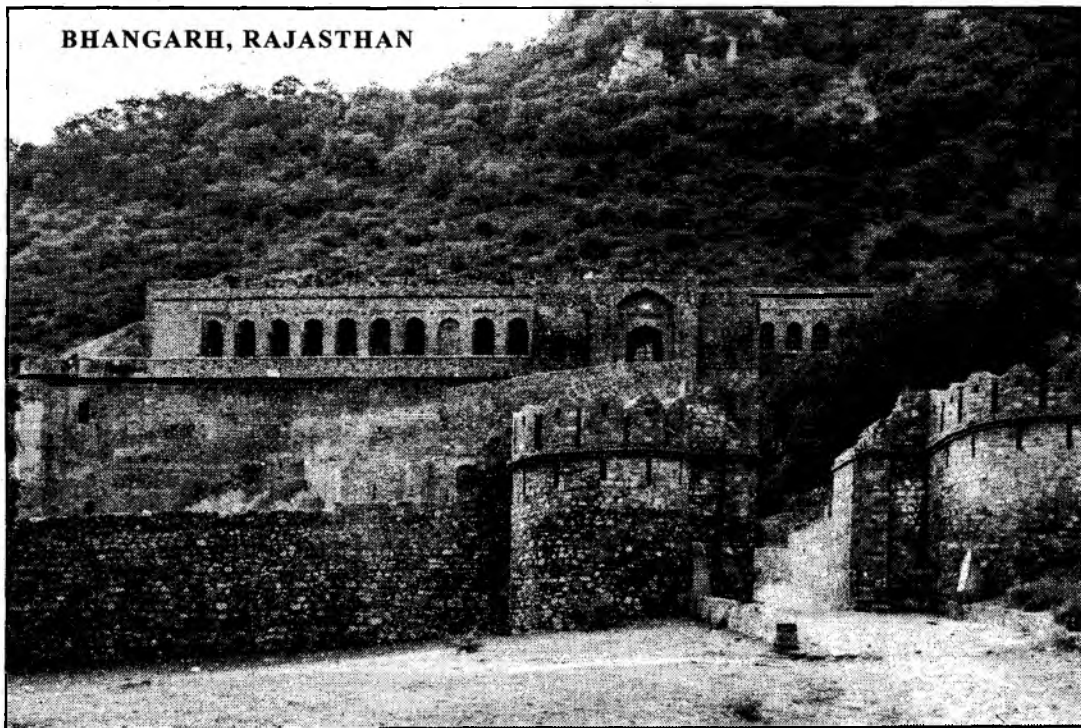
If you are a daredevil waiting to explore the deep oceans, dangerous gorges and hidden crevices of the country's terrain, here is a list of some extreme destinations across India for you hand-picked by EaseMyTrip.com.

### BHANGARH, RAJASTHAN

The village of Bhangarh is located in the Alwar District of Rajasthan and is home to the most dangerous and scariest forts in the country. Rajasthan is a popular destination because of its landscapes, mountains, palaces and temples, but perhaps no place is more beautiful and terrifying than Bhangarh Fort. The Fort has been around since ancient times and is internationally known for its incredible architecture and haunted happenings. Many visitors have even pointed out that while visiting the fort, they constantly feel like they're being followed by someone. The government prohibits anyone from going into this area after sunset because there have been numerous cases of abductions and deaths. So harness all your courage and be swept away by the thrills!

### KALAVANTIN DURG TREK, RAIGAD

Situated in the Western Ghats of Mumbai, Kalavantin Durg Trek, at 2300 feet is one of the most challenging treks in the country. The path is etched with rock-cut steps, steep slopes and unstable staircases that are deprived of the support of any kind. While the trek to and from the fortress is dangerous, it is every adrenaline junkies dream. The trail gets even steeper and almost vertigo-inducing on the way up. Rain and winds in the middle of the trek make it even more dangerous with a lot of trekkers having to cling onto the steps mid-trek. The downward course of the trek is also challenging as it provides low visibility due to the fog. While the trek is a tough one, once you reach the top, the bird's eye view of the raw beauty and scenic landscapes of neighbouring villages and mountains makes it worthwhile.



### DUMAS BEACH, GUJARAT

Often referred to as the 'Jewel of the West', Gujarat is a land of magnificent palaces and temples, beautiful beaches, wildlife, and natural terrain. One such place is Dumas Beach in South Gujarat, which is famous for its black sand and tranquillity. Folklore indicates that the beach was used as a burial ground for Hindus, resulting in black sand, as remains of people buried here are said to still haunt it. Several tourists and locals have mentioned that they have heard eerie sounds and laughter on the beach, and many visitors have also mysteriously gone missing from the beach. If you are craving a thrilling and spooky experience, don't forget to visit Dumas Beach - one of the most haunted places in India!

### DRAS, LADAKH

Looking for an adventure with an added element of danger? Make your way to discover the spectacular beauty and the danger of the picturesque Dras located in the Kargil district of Ladakh. Known as the "Gateway to Ladakh", Dras is the second coldest inhabited region on the planet. Located at 10,597 feet above sea level, the air is always chilly and temperature often drops to -45 degrees Celsius. The lowest recorded temperature here is -60 degrees Celsius. Apart from contending with hypothermia, visitors have to also be cautious of military incursions in the area. It's hard to resist the mysterious allure of this little mountain village with its frosty temperatures, which makes it mysteriously appealing to explore. (IANSLife)

## The Varanasi hot air balloon festival

By Olivia Sarkar

For most, Kaashi is the seat of the gods, one sees colourful throngs of pilgrims, a vast sacred-cape, and life-ending climatic ceremonies at the undulating ganga while navigating its crowded streets, which unfold like a Broadway production and a costume drama all at once.

Many seekers, literary personalities, old world flaneurs, and residents flock to the ghats at Varanasi to take their redemptive holy plunge; with its antique charm, it has served as a continual muse.

In its attempt to enchant its apostles and acolytes with another perspective, on the occasion of Dev Deepawali, the city presented another distinct perspective for travellers to enjoy its mystic appeal and floating lights on its river. The Uttar Pradesh Tourism organised the Varanasi Hot Air Balloon Festival, for visitors to enjoy the joyous celebration of gods celebrating Diwali, and see the city in all its glory from an aerial view.

The Festival adds this experiential repertory, in addition to its landlocked beauties - temples, old paths, craft traditions, gastronomic cornucopia, and unravelling legends in every nook and corner.

This new offering, according to Mukesh Kumar Meshram, Principal Secretary, Culture and Tourism, adds another experience for explorers and will position Varanasi as a top destination for many premium and high-value travellers from around the world. He also stated that the post Covid tourism will focus on creating authentic experiences and traditions into modern packaging for long-term tourism sustainability.

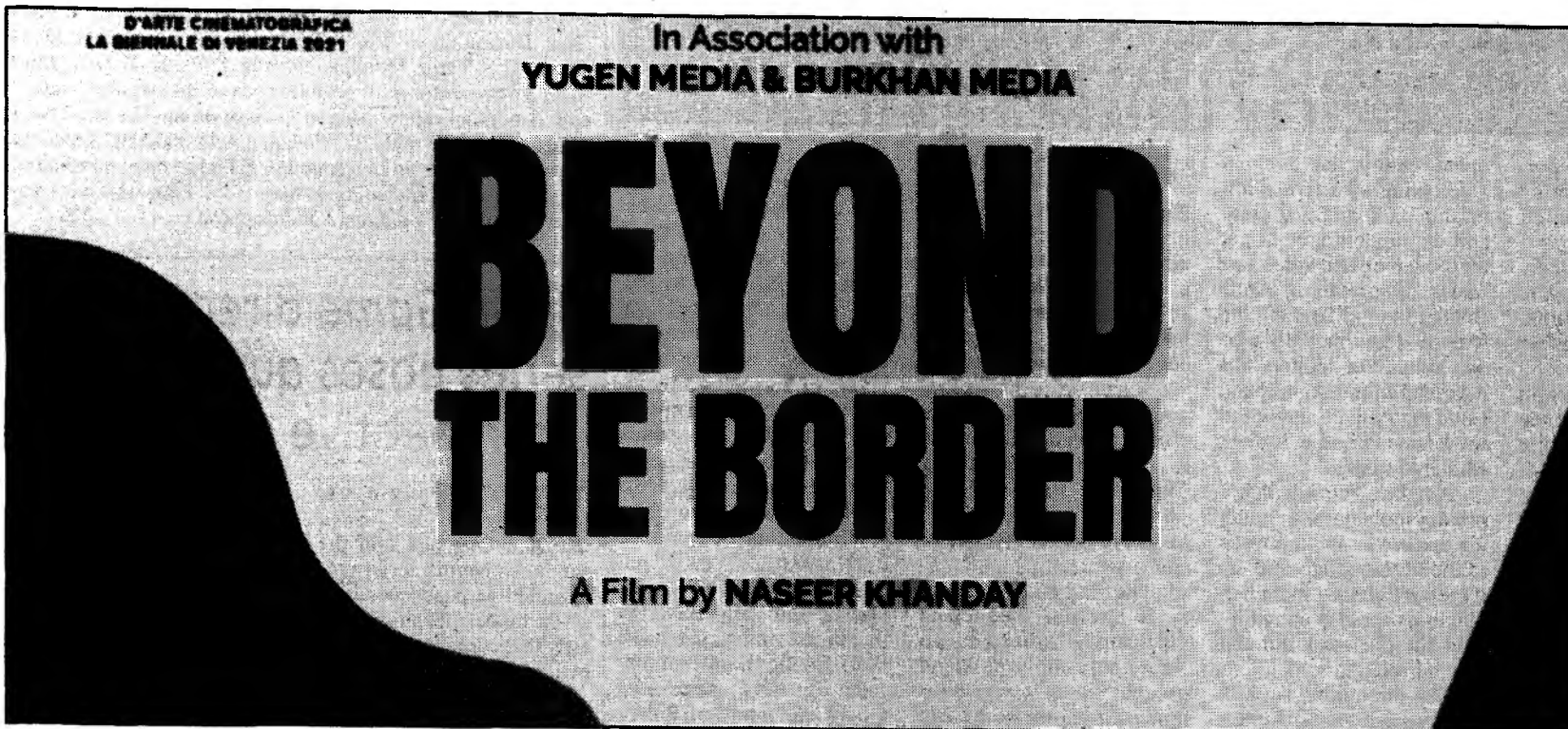
On the occasion, Samit Garg, Founder and CEO of E-factor Entertainment who hosted the event said that this new offering adds an authentic and high-value offering for the city's 'living heritage,' and that the city's breath-taking terrain and bird's eye view match perfectly in splendour with its wonderfully preserved wonders on the ground. He also stated that New Age travellers are looking for a new type of tourism that is not based on a single product but rather on a succession of fresh and transforming 'experiences.' There is a growing desire for 'exploratory and experience travel' over traditional leisure activities such as visiting tourist attractions.

The Varanasi Hot Air Balloon Festival, which runs from November 17 to 19, is intended to usher in a new era in Uttar Pradesh tourism for well-heeled global visitors.



# India's first cryptocurrency funded documentary to be screened at FLIFF

# Jaipur Lit Festival goes hybrid in 2022



India's first crypto-funded documentary by Kashmiri filmmaker Naseer Khanday on Afghanistan's skiing culture is scheduled to be screened at the ongoing Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival (FLIFF) in the US.

A statement issued on behalf of Naseer Khanday said on Wednesday that the documentary will be screened at the film fest this month.

The documentary is co-produced by Suril Desai, an international lawyer and expert on blockchain and cryptocurrency practice.

"The documentary 'Beyond the Border' on the skiing culture of Afghanistan by independent filmmaker from Kashmir, Naseer Khanday, is all set to be screened at the Fort Lauderdale film festival in November. The documentary received rave reviews when it premiered at the Venice film festival in September this year.

"This is Naseer's second documentary film based on a story from a 'conflict zone'. His award-winning debut film 'Iron Khan' is a journey through seven years of a man's life, his coming of age during the peak of militancy in Kashmir and his struggle for survival in the face of precarity and violence," the

statement said. "Beyond the Border" captures Bamiyan-Afghanistan's skiing hub - that sits opposite the cliffs where sixth century statues were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001.

"Yet local athletes continue to pursue their passion, making their own gear out of wooden planks, metal, plastic, and rope. Dave and Mitch, two snowboarders from Canada visited Afghanistan to distribute snowboarding gear which they imported and ride the mighty Hindu-Kush mountain range. They aim to give local youth as many snowboards as possible with a hope to distract them from the state of desolation in which they live.

"There is much more to Afghanistan than just wars and conflict. We want to talk about the possibility of peace and inclusion in Afghanistan's war-torn countryside set against the backdrop of a budding winter sports scene," says Naseer. Naseer shares an interesting anecdote on how Afghanistan holds a special place in European skiing's lexicon.

"European aficionados of Alpine skiing often refer to a downhill race as a "Kandahar." The name derives from a British general, Frederick Sleigh Roberts, who won a major

victory at Kandahar in 1880 and was subsequently knighted. He chose for himself the title "Lord Roberts of Kandahar". Later, he was involved with organising the first-ever downhill ski race in Europe (in 1911), which was called "The Roberts of Kandahar Challenge", the statement said.

The co-producer of both "Beyond the Border" and "Iron Khan" Suril Desai was instrumental in generating crypto funding to partially finance the production of "Beyond the Border".

According to him, cryptocurrency is a great boon especially for documentary filmmakers that film in conflict zones as they no longer have to worry about converting and carrying cash to meet their production costs.

"Though I have never skied nor snowboarded, I have produced two documentaries about the winter sports culture, both in heavily conflicted regions of the world. I realised that there are a lot of similarities culturally in the two regions. Activities like winter sports can bring about a lot of changes in the lives of the people in these regions. It opens their minds to new experiences and can improve their economic well-being", said Suril. (IANS)

The iconic annual Jaipur Literature Festival will be back at its cherished home - Jaipur - in a hybrid avatar with both its on-ground magnificence as well as its nifty virtual presence. The hybrid version will enable a larger audience to access the Festival offerings, reaching out to book-lovers across continents. It will be a powerful feast of literature, discourse and camaraderie.

Teamwork Arts, the Festival producer, announced the dates for its landmark 15th edition, setting them between 28th January - 6th February 2022. The virtual sessions will go live from 28th January to 6th February with an extended online experience.

2022 heralds new beginnings when the Festival will combine the cautious optimism of a post-pandemic world along with the sheer joy that books can bring - both online and on-ground. The Festival will represent all Indian national languages and multiple foreign languages too with over 300 hours of programming with and over 250 speakers.

For over a decade, Jaipur has played host to the annual Jaipur Literature Festival, dubbed the 'greatest literary show on Earth', a haven for literature-lovers and festival-goers alike. After a much successful virtual edition of the Festival last year, with over 10 million views worldwide, the 2022 edition will introduce the audience to the brand new and 'super' hybrid version at a spanking new venue with an enhanced experience and facilities. The Festival will be organised at Hotel Clarks Amber, Jaipur with added facilities to accommodate footfalls and will follow COVID 19 safety protocols as per government guidelines.

This first-ever truly hybrid literary extravaganza will showcase a plethora of themes and writers curated specially for audiences across the world, offering an immersive experience of literature,

discourse, musical performances, art installations, merchandise, local cuisine and more. In its milestone hybrid edition, the Festival aims to be even wider in its reach and longer in duration, covering 10 days.

A preliminary list of speakers includes Indian poet and author of the latest Women Who Wear Only Themselves Arundhati Subramaniam; Delhi-based vascular and endovascular surgeon, writer and Director of the Vascular Cath Lab at Sir Ganga Ram hospital Dr. Ambarish Satwik; eminent art critic, art historian B.N. Goswami; senior fellow at the Hudson Institute and the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, former Portuguese politician and author Bruno Maeces; bio archaeologist and field archaeologist specialising in the Viking Age, Viking women and Rapa Nui Dr. Cat Jarman; 2021 Booker Prize winner for his novel The Promise Damon Galgut; Australian author and 2003 Booker Prize winner for his debut novel Vernon God Little DBC Pierre; Indian-born British writer, playwright and screenwriter Farrukh Dhondy.

The list continues with National Book Award-winning author and 2002 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction finalist Jonathan Franzen; author of acclaimed novels like The Miniatrist and Kalkatta and a collection of stories titled The Japanese Wife Kunal Basu; academic and author of Cultivating Democracy: Politics and Citizenship in Agrarian India Mukulika Banerjee; member of parliament and author Dr. Shashi Tharoor; debutant novelist of the latest Equations Shivani Sibal; historian and author of three acclaimed books, Sixteen Stormy Days, Imperial Sovereignty and Local Politics and the latest Nehru: The Debates that Defined India Tripurdaman Singh; historian and the author of four acclaimed books, with his latest being Savarkar: A Contested Legacy, 1924-1966 Vikram Sampath. (IANS/life)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, NOV 21, 2021

Moon is apogee on your solar return chart and it will give you fantastic results. You will make good progress in your job and business. Your financial position will also get stable and strong. You will also plan a major expansion of your business in collaboration or partnership. Additional sources of income will be tapped. Your activities will continue in many fields. You will feel better than before. The understanding between husband and wife will be good. Love mates will come closer to each other. You will plan to buy a new house/shop or property. You will buy new items like vehicles, TV or expensive electronic gadgets. The results of job related exams will be in your favor. You will find yourself in a very favorable situation. Be transparent in your business dealings. You will reap rich benefits in the bargain.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**  
The beginning of the week is going to be fantastic. You will negotiate and clinch a favorable business deal. It will be very important and you will have gains. It is appropriate to go for partnership than independent business/work at this stage. Working together will get good results. You will be energetic and will not shy away from doing any challenging work. You will have peace of mind and will be relaxed. Wealth will be good. Your income too will rise. And you will enjoy this favorable time period. Your well wishers will help you a lot. You will have better understanding with your mate. Spend time with friends and family. You will be engaged in social work. You will be engaged in legal matters and your life will be filled with joy and love.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**  
A wonderful week awaits you ahead. You will be enjoying a favorable phase in your life. You will never be short of funds and money will keep coming. Your enemies will also not be able to stand before you. You will also bring a good name for your family. Your efforts and hard work will give you good results. But the pressure of work will be too much. But you will manage it well. You will remain busy and will not be able to give time to your family. Your partner will not be happy with it. You need to balance the things and need to look at your family affairs too. There can be a discussions or argument in your family. But you will avoid it. A family function will also take place. You will be pleased and happy in the company of your friends.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**  
You will have peace of mind. You will march ahead in your profession and outshine one and all. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will also explore additional sources of income. Friendly and attentive behavior will take you ahead. You will take part in the work of social welfare. You will also enjoy a wonderful love life and get success in love matters. You will also spend quality time with your family and plan to go on a short trip for relaxation and fun. You will be promoted in your job. You will also like to get transferred to a place of your choice. You will be able to bring changes in your personality. You will also be admired all around. Your intelligent investment can be beneficial for the future.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**  
This is going to be an amazing week for you. All the hurdles and obstacles will get removed. You will make progress in your job. Your business will also prosper and flourish. You will have manifold gains. Income will be good. You will have a lot to do and your hands will be full. You will be involved in your work and you will also be relieved by resolving a matter with some special help from others. Talking to friends will keep you happy. You will also fall in love with a person known to you or working in your office. The husband and wife will have good level of understanding. You will witness a rise in your fortunes and you could be promoted too all of a sudden. You will do even the tedious work with full enthusiasm. You will also work tirelessly, which will increase the confidence of people on you.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**  
Your efforts will start giving results. You will have rich dividends in your business/work. You will get promoted in your job. You may also get work orders from abroad. You will be admired in your office and home. These are mentally satisfying days. You will be a winner. You will get success in love and romance. Love mates will enjoy wonderful bonding. A secret of yours may come out but it will not trouble you much. You will get support and love from children and parents. You may visit any relative's house for an important function. You can also plan a family/business trip. You will be able to solve your problems. You will also work with pleasure. Economic condition will be strengthened. You will solve some vital issues.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**  
Time is changing fast and you will have good days to enjoy. You will do something which will bring you lot of name and fame. Some people will challenge your authority but will be unable to do anything. You will be targeted purposely but you will not be humiliated or pushed to corner. Nor your work will get struck. You will be the winner. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will have wonderful bonding with your mate. You will

enjoy confidence of your family members. Students will get success in exams/interview. Your choice of work will be completed. If you decide to marry a person of your liking, it will be worth it. Your family members will give full support. You can start a new job/business. If you are working in the public relation, it will turn up faster.

**Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)**  
The mantra for your success this week is hard work, self belief in your own abilities and working to your potentials to the fullest. You will think about your work and complete all your tasks. You will enjoy good working relations with your colleagues. Your seniors will support you. The economic side will be strong. You will also make new investments. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your spouse. Your children will listen to you. Unmarried boy/girl can be married. The new couple will make use of their time completely. You will enjoy watching movies, gardening and also walking around. You will also help people a lot. You will also get interested in religion, spirituality and meditation. You will be attending a family function too.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**  
Time will be perfectly good for you. Your exams results will be favorable. You will also take a final decision regarding change of job or starting a new business. A person may hurt you and you will get upset. Your income will increase. You will dominate at your workplace. And it is important to tell your subordinates clearly what you expect from them. You will also do some shopping. Working women will get full support. You will have peace of mind. Lovebirds will have a good time. A marriage proposal will come to you all of a sudden. You may accept it. You will have peace of mind. Your health will be perfect. You will give a new look to your house/office and redesign it. You will expand your social circle.

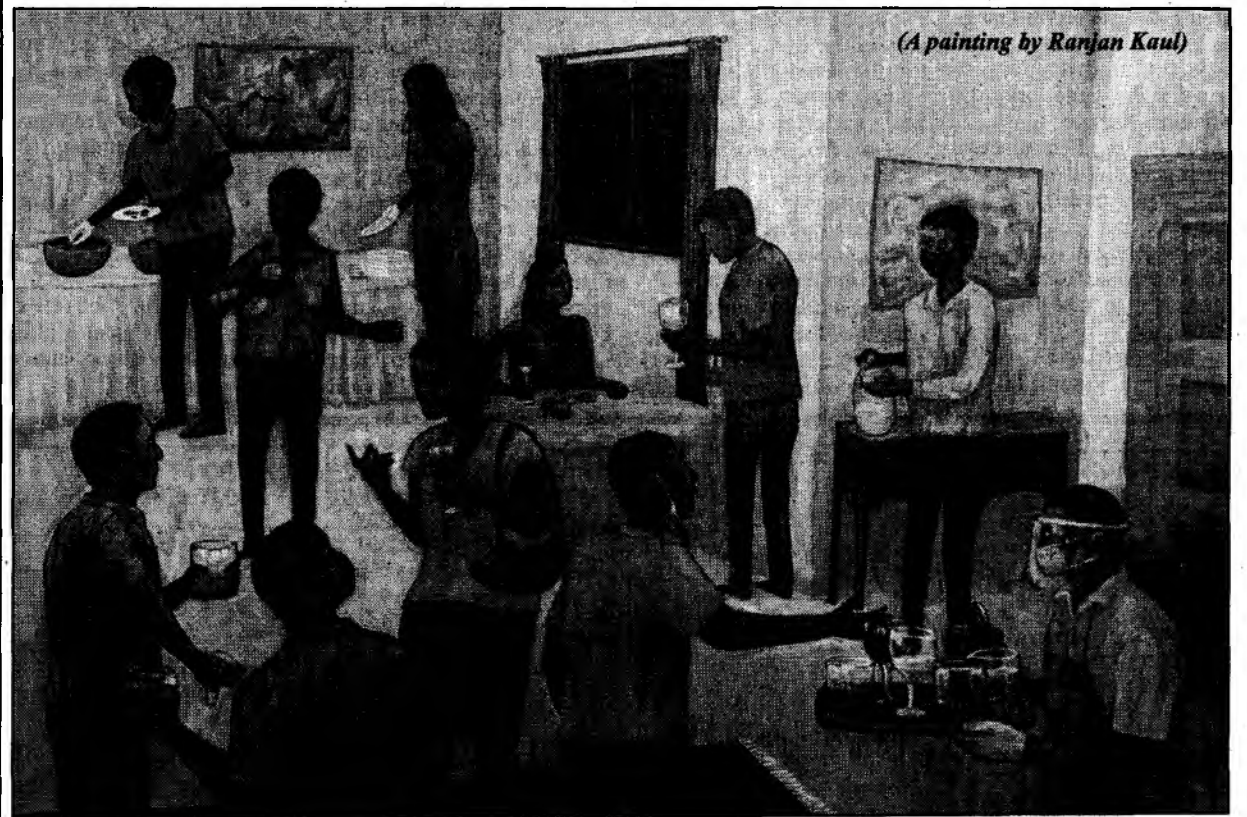
**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)**  
It is going to be a fruitful and productive week. You will feel peaceful and relaxed. You will earn more profit from little work. Income will be good. You can also move to a new locality of your choice. This is the right time to take advantage of the hard work of the past. You will feel relaxed. You can get promotion, allowance, incentives too. Work on land or property will begin. You will buy new things. The behavior will be pleasant in the neighborhood. The plans for the auspicious program will be made. You will be very happy. Make home a house for peace, joy and bliss. You will give lot of importance to your family. You will not trust everyone in financial matters. You need to explore the significance of life within.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**  
As the things are again looking to pick up this week, you will await the results of efforts that you have put in your work. The fruits of waiting will be beneficial. There will be happiness and a feeling of satisfaction on your face. Your bosses will appreciate your performance. You could be given a salary hike, bonus, incentives or a big jump in your job. Your importance too will be felt by one and all. Your opponents and enemies will get defeated. You will have control over your actions. Your work will get accomplished. Your spouse will be happy at the success of your work and all praise you will get. Love will also play an important role in your life. You will balance your personal and professional life very well. You will also pay attention to yoga, exercise and spirituality. Your luck will be favorable.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**  
You will get opportunities to rise in your job and business. You will also receive an auspicious news. There is no need to take additional risks. Everything will work out perfectly for you. You will have monetary gains and your economic condition will be strong. You will also undertake business related trips and they will prove to be beneficial. You will be happy with your married life. Your family will expect a lot from you. And there will be lot of hustle-bustle. You will be able to keep your cool and not exchange any hot words with your neighbors. Do not do anything in a hurry. Your attempts to recovery will be successful. The road to progress will become brighter. Your tour will be beneficial. You will be busy in praying to god. People will praise your qualities.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**  
There are possibilities of big financial gains this week for you. You will make new investments too. Income will be good. You will also plan to buy a new property or vehicle. Those looking for job will get success after all. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your spouse. You will also get the support of your better half. Favorable responses will be for unmarried people. You will be busy in the preparation of any festival. You will be also having hold on your society. In family, there will be good relations between mother and daughter, also your wife and sister. You will also help those who are old, ill and weak. You will be able to connect with them at an emotional level. There will be change in circumstances. You will prosper and be happy. You will get name, fame and prestige.

# Of the pandemic and other miseries



(A painting by Ranjan Kaul)

Artist Ranjan Kaul is presenting his fourth solo exhibition titled 'Ringside View' that tells the story of contemporary times through the painter's eyes at Open Palm Court Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi (on till November 18).

Ranjan Kaul continues to evolve his nuanced oeuvre that chronicles and portrays quotidian life by infusing it with drama, colour and emotion. He portrays real-life stories not merely as an active participant, but as an empathetic and perceptive observer.

In this exhibition, he showcases not only the time of the pandemic but the pre-and post-pandemic periods as well. The plight of migrant labourers, who travelled thousands of kilometres from the metropolis to their homes and are now back -- once again in search of a livelihood. He has depicted them through a series of artworks like 'Flight to Survival' and 'Rootless', and their life on the footpath as in 'Home and Supper'.

In his work 'An Arm and a Leg for a Job', migrant labourers have been shown in post-pandemic times sitting vacantly in the big city, jobless, lost, defeated.

During the lockdown, cars gathered dust, salons dented their shutters. While 'Shine' comments on the futility of the fascination with material want,

'Beauty' draws attention to the growing obsession with the outward self. 'Beauty' also looks at how the real persona is morphing into a virtual, false entity with the widespread use of social media - the reflection in the mirror is a new reality, while the 'real' is reduced to a mere shadow.

With the virus redefining physical spaces, 'Ringside' depicts the transformation in human behaviour - with people on a short fuse, a minor road accident leading to a major skirmish while onlookers watch the incident. Issues related to women safety on deserted streets with the easing of lockdown restrictions are another concern that kindles the artist's imagination in 'Twilight Zone'. 'Holding On' portrays the resilience of women in the face of tribulations.

Lockdown has led to group isolation and people's disconnection with the world outside the bubble. In 'Cocktail Party', an evening of high-society gathering is depicted with palpable tension in the air, even as the people inside are unaware of being watched from the window. The work is also a comment on the increasing invasions of privacy. The post-pandemic series, 'Fragmented', depicts the grave fallout on the human psyche and mental health.

The curatorial advisor for the exhibition is Aakshat Sinha. (IANS)

*"Never let the future disturb you. You will meet it, if you have to, with the same weapons of reason which today arm you against the present."*

— Marcus Aurelius

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 102 SHILLONG, MONDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2021

### Modi's turnaround on farm laws

AGITATING farmers had the last laugh; or they have considerable relief, at least. A year of sustained agitation has paid off in meeting their principal demand - the repeal of the three farm laws brought into force by the Modi government last year. It is clear Prime Minister Modi bent to the will of farmers in the context of the approaching assembly polls in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. The farmer agitation was limited to UP, Punjab and Haryana while the farmers in most states kept quiet. In other words, the farmers in general were willing to give a try to the farm reforms. Yet, the well-heeled farmers in the three states, in the forefront of the agitation, did not want to disturb the present system that fetched them good returns.

The reverse is true of the small and medium farmers. They had nothing to lose and their plight remained worse all along. Reason why they were in a mood to try out the new system is because corporates would directly step into farms and purchase the products without middlemen. Middlemen were the curse of the farm sector and they appropriated the bulk of the benefits from the farms at the cost of the farmers. Yet, the ordinary farmers now lost out in the tug of war between the big farmers and the Modi establishment. They have been orphaned by the PM. Question is, with what face can Modi carry on now. His apology meant too little. Many farmers died during the agitation, some due to Covid19 too. To that extent, there's blood on the PM's hands. Yet, he stood the ground for a year - a period when the agitation was reaching nowhere. What changed the tide in their favour now was the upcoming assembly polls. Perceptions thus strengthened that the PM went back on a major reform step if only to retrieve the lost ground for his BJP in UP and Punjab. This could be stretched to mean Modi sacrificed national interests for narrow political gains.

The farmers are now asking for more - and threatening to continue the fight. Worse, Modi's about-turn will also mean the ghosts of CAA and Article 370 will now be exorcised. The Opposition itself will be more emboldened to fight Modi. Regional sharks and dynasts are sharpening their knives to "kill" Modi politically and grab power in Delhi. Modi now gives them all a new energy. True, all present-day politicians would go to any lengths to promote their personal interests. If anything, Modi proved he is not made of a different stuff.

## Meghalaya's Traditional Grassroot Institutions: Who owns them?

By Toki Blah

In a broad Policy decision the Govt of India (GOI) had decided that from 1st April 2022 onwards, the ongoing DRDA programme will henceforth be merged with the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). It was after all to be expected as the GOI begins to carry forward its plans for "Less Government and more Governance". The immediate reaction from Meghalaya which had been exempted from the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution and therefore had no Panchayats, was a smug counter proposal to merge the DRDA programme with our Autonomous District Councils (ADCs). By next morning however the realization must have dawned that such a proposal would bring in more misery than solve problems. Our ADCs by no stretch of the imagination could be compared with the development oriented Panchayati Raj Institutions

more itsy-bitsy, pint-sized and frivolous Districts) but by creating institutions of governance at the grassroot level to be manned, run and managed by the people and communities themselves. The democratic profile of such institutions lay in the election of its members through universal adult franchise. Their inclusive nature lies in the equal participation of both men and women in decision making; their power, through their ability to identify, plan and budget for the development needs of the community from a pre-determined legislated catalog of activities; their empowerment, through trainings on basic concepts of financial management systems, accountability and transparency; their viability, through their ability to claim ownership and management of assets created by them-

through a 'stay' obtained from the Supreme Court. The respite however is temporary as the 'stay' could be vacated any time to take us back from where we started.

The disappointment is amplified when the victim themselves, the Traditional Dorbars, remain mute and indifferent to the urgent and felt need for their transformation into modern vehicles of inclusive governance to provide meaningful service to the communities they serve. Shameful to admit but most are still stuck in the ridiculous debate over participation of women in Dorbar meetings.

It has now become obvious to all, but the politically blind, that empowerment of our traditional grassroot institutions, be they in Jaintia, Khasi or Garo Hills, is an issue of crucial importance

on earth why the benefits of direct funding available to other communities of India should not be made available to the people of Meghalaya. No reason for our rural communities to subsist only on doles from the MLA schemes. No reason for them to beg so that they remain in perpetual poverty.

In conclusion, next year as we celebrate the 50th year of Meghalaya's statehood let it not be a celebration for extending the abuse of power by the political class but of a resolve to elevate people's power towards better governance. We shall adopt legislative measures towards devolution of more powers for local self government. Programmes of livelihood promotion; poverty reduction; improving health and education; sustainable natural resource management together with effective waste management concepts will be the future issues that will



whose powers and functions have been duly elaborated in the XI Schedule. Our ADCs on the other hand are top heavy overturned pyramids, with a huge entourage of babus at head office and a minuscule field presence limited to Forest Guards and dubious staff manning questionable check gates on the National and State Highways. Diverting DRDA activities and funds to the ADCs can only be compared to attempting to load a leaky boat with heavy boulders. Both would simply sink without a trace. It was a no go!

So we backtracked and the Minister of C&RD, Hamletson Dohling, declared the next day that Meghalaya would seek exemption from this move of the GOI. This counter proposal from GOM means that permission would be sought from GOI to maintain the ongoing process of DRDA implementation to be carried on by Project Directors assisted by a team of officers and professional staff. For the uninitiated the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) set up in 1999, is the principal organ at the District level to oversee the implementation of different anti-poverty programmes of the GOI. Here once again Meghalaya exhibited, in the most embarrassing manner, its inability to gauge the intentions and degree of commitment of the GOI on the concept and policy of decentralizing administration.

The whole idea behind the Panchayati Raj Bill was to bring administration closer to the people (not as some believe by creating more and

to the people of Meghalaya. The very relevance of our Dorbars, Akhings or by whatever name they are known is at stake. The critical issue is to give them the legal power, clout and authority through legislation to execute their mandate as grassroot institutions of governance as tradition meant them to be. Let these traditional bodies continue to be known by their local traditional names. That is not the issue. The real issue is for a uniform Grassroot Governance Bill that cuts across the whole state. In Meghalaya we have three different ADCs each with its own system of village administration. In the KHADC it's more confusing as each Hima has its own set of laws on how governance is to be administered. Confusion is worst confounded with every Dorbar having its own Constitution. Absolute chaos and confusion prevails. The need for a uniform Law cannot be underscored.

For 29 long years, Meghalaya and its elected leaders, both at the State and ADC Level contemptuously brushed such expectations under the carpet. We steadfastly refused the need to bring our traditional bodies to a level where they could really serve the needs of their respective communities. We witnessed instead the ploy of petty politics between the State Govt and our District Councils over ownership of our traditional institutions, forgetting that our traditional bodies belong to no one but the communities they serve. In this tussle the vital issue of legislation on how to bring our traditional bodies at par with the needs of the times was forgotten. Our Dorbars were left to languish where history discovered them 200 years ago. This neglect blew up on our faces when a High Court order in 2014 questioned the legal status of the Rangbah Shmong. Tradition came under legal scrutiny and was found wanting. Chaos and confusion ensued and normalcy only returned

demand better governance through active participation of empowered communities. We have our traditional village Dorbars. There is no question of diluting their mandate as the upholders of culture and traditional values but at the same time they must be empowered and prepared to shoulder the responsibilities and demands of modern governance.

One of the resolutions of the recent Climate conclave at Glasgow is to support Indigenous practices of absorbing carbon through community administered forests. i.e. our sacred groves. Our traditional institutions however, lack the authority and dexterity to interact with International donors. Then there is the rising global demand for fresh water that is expected to increase a thousand-fold. Meghalaya receives billions of tonnes of fresh water every monsoon. Approximately 64 billion cu.mts or so. We need technology (perhaps from Israel) to empower our communities to harvest and store this water for a thirsty world willing to pay for this life sustaining resource. Our Dorbars require only three basic needs: legal recognition through an act of legislation; empowerment to act as true grassroots governance systems; financial management skills to handle direct funding from outside agencies. Our politicians are required to do nothing except facilitate the above three prerequisites and watch Meghalaya and its Institutions grow to their full potential.

The State Legislature can do it through (Art 243M(2a) read with Para 5 of List II of 7th Schedule, read with para 12 A(a) of 6th Schedule) or alternatively by all three District Councils passing identical bills in their respective councils. It should be made clear to all that such a Bill is not to belittle the ADCs or to demonstrate the power of the State over the ADCs. It is simply to demonstrate to the world that we have the political resolve to envision on how to ensure better and efficient delivery of service to the people and that this is the ultimate goal of our politics. There is no reason

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## Lessons in democracy from farm laws

By Ajit Ranade

The Prime Minister in a pre-election address made the rather unexpected announcement that the three contentious farm laws would be repealed in the next session of Parliament. Because this decision comes close to impending State elections it is not possible to shrug off the feeling that the announcement was influenced by electoral calculations. Clearly the ruling party BJP did not want to take political risks on such a divisive issue which had been opposed fiercely by the farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. But thanks to a determined and feisty year-long agitation the opposition to the farm laws had spread to many other States, and even pro-open market, regulation-free farm groups had changed their earlier stance and decided to oppose the laws.

As such all three laws enlarged the freedoms available to farmers. The first gave them an additional option of selling outside the mandi system. The second allowed them to freely enter into contracts with corporations or large buyers. And the third, removed any restrictions on stocking and storage, implying free pricing of agricultural products. Despite enlarging the freedoms, i.e., providing more options to the farmer, how is the fierce and sustained opposition to be explained? It is because the laws were silent on the

were unable to convince the agitators.

However, it is misleading to say that the failure was merely because of inadequate communication. The real lacuna was that parliamentary process of lawmaking was not followed. The laws were first introduced as ordinances, that too in the middle of a devastating pandemic. Then three months later they were converted to bills in Parliament and were passed by a brute majority, but without any discussion, debate or deliberation. The by now accepted and normal process of referring the bills to the Standing Committee was dispensed with. Hence the only recourse left for those expressing misgivings was to take to the streets or approach the Supreme Court. The signs of misgivings were there right from June. In fact, on passage of the law, one of the ruling party's allies, the Akali Dal expressed its discomfiture, and its member resigned from the Union Cabinet. It was not a protest resignation, but the signs were clear. The absence of dialogue and feedback, and also dissent, all essential ingredients of a parliamentary democracy were undeniable. The agitation was seeking the support of "janata ki adalat" i.e. the people's court, and petitioners also approached the apex court, which finally stayed the three laws in January 2021.

Even the PM's abrupt

**The PM said that he was retracting the laws because he was unable to persuade the farmers of the benefits of these reforms. Not just him, but a whole machinery of opinion-makers, politicians, citizens' groups and pro-government media apparently were unable to convince the agitators.**

implications. For instance, if there was freedom to sell outside the mandi system, did it mean that the government would whittle down its support for maintenance of the mandi system? For after all the mandi is where the farmer was able to get an assured Minimum Support Price, with protection against being cheated for quantity or with price fudging. Did the government plan to eventually dismantle the mandi, since it was fiscally unsustainable?

The second law allowed free contractual relationships, but what if there was a dispute? The law was silent, nay prohibited the farmer from taking recourse to a court. Only the district magistrate was empowered to arbitrate, with every possibility that he or she would side with the large corporate buyer. Why was the law silent on addressing this concern of the farmer? As for the third law, the less said the better. In the same week when the law was passed in Parliament, the Centre imposed a ban on export of onions, fearing a price spike. So, a price development which would have benefited onion farmers, was negated to protect the interest of urban customers / voters. Thus, how can the farmers be assured that the newfound freedom embodied in the three new laws would not be arbitrarily curtailed to suit the politics of the day? Or that there were hidden implications not visible to a first cut reading?

Of course, the farmers were and are much smarter. They were unconvinced and saw the laws as detrimental to their cause and were willing to literally lay down their lives to oppose the "reform" laws. And inevitably other forces, some politically opportunistic, jumped on the bandwagon and gave the whole farmers' agitation much greater momentum.

The PM said that he was retracting the laws because he was unable to persuade the farmers of the benefits of these reforms. Not just him, but a whole machinery of opinion makers, politicians, citizens' groups and pro-government media apparently

decision to repeal the laws did not follow parliamentary protocol. For instance, it wasn't clear if there was a Cabinet resolution. And why could the repealing not wait when Parliament had convened? In a democratic form of government, the procedure is as sacrosanct as the outcome. And it is not merely a "tick box" compliance of procedures, but in letter and spirit. The opposition view as well as the wisdom of the Standing Committees must be taken. In a recent debate in the UK Parliament, when the PM was restless and breaking protocol, he was chided by the Speaker who told him sharply, "You may be Prime Minister of the country, but I am in charge in this House". A somewhat similar incident took place in the life of a civil servant R. P. Noronha when he was district magistrate in Madhya Pradesh. Due to an ugly communal situation, he had to impose a curfew and the police were barely able to keep two hostile communities separate. As luck would have it the Prime Minister of the country, was in town and wanted to directly negotiate peace and meet the volatile mobs, much against the curfew restrictions. The District Magistrate warned the PM, in the same vein must have said, "you may be the PM of the country, but I am in charge here, and if you disobey my orders, I will have to arrest you". Thankfully the PM complied and stayed put at the circuit house. This is recounted in Noronha's memoirs, and a small incident like this is the essence of democratic governance and constitutional fidelity.

All said and done, the street action, the Supreme Court's intervention, the PM's acceptance and retracting, and a probably healthy debate in Parliament on these farm laws is a validation of the robustness of India's democratic functioning. That is a cause for celebration.

(Dr. Ajit Ranade is an economist and Senior Fellow, Takshashila Institution) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

### Letters to the Editor

#### VoPP is born; all the best

Editor,

Since Meghalaya's history began in 1972, there has not been a government worse than the present one that began in the spring of 2018, when the streets from Khyndailad to Rajbhavan were adorned with the saffron flag. An elderly gentleman watching the procession in front of the AG's office building whispered, 'Man, had the BJP won this time I wonder what would have been the situation.' I explained to him that aligning with the BJP will be beneficial for Meghalaya since financial help from the centre would flow into our dry exchequer.

While the jubilation and celebrations were happening, the Congress watched with disbelief at how the

acolytes of Hopingstone Lyngdoh and B.B Lyngdoh could feast with the NPP. The NPP was formed after PA Sangma was expelled by the NCP (Nationalist Congress Party) which was formed in 2008. The NCP was formed when the Indian identity of the then President of the Congress - Sonia Gandhi was challenged by Sharad Pawar and others including Mr PA Sangma. Pawar was expelled from the Congress and with him Purno Sangma also quit the Congress which in the previous term had made him the Union Minister for Labour and Coal. A year later Purno Sangma quit the NCP and formed the NPP. In the last Lok Sabha election the NPP got one seat from Garo Hills with Agatha Sangma defeating Dr Mukul Sangma. But courtesy the Government of India and the Election Com-

mission of India, although the NPP has just one Lok Sabha member in a house of 540 parliamentarians, the Party got 'national party' status. On careful scrutiny of the MDA, it is crystal clear that it has always been inclined towards the BJP. Hence Agatha Sangma voted for the CAA. And now the NDA Government is trying to rope in the corporates (some among the world's top ten) in the energy sectors with the new Electricity Act to be tabled soon in the Lok Sabha. If this Bill is passed we would have to pay through our noses for the power that comes to our homes.

More distressing, however, is that the two so-called regional parties abide by all the policy matters of the NPP since they have no policy of their own. To point out each of these instances would

occupy too much space but social media is a good indicator at the dismal performance of the regional party MLAs in the House when grilled by the Congress and by KHNAM MLA, Adelbert Nongrum. They all come across as incompetent.

Coming to the Voice of the People Party (VoPP), which has promised to restore the dignity of Meghalaya, we expect a lot from it and from its leader, Ardent Basaiawmoit. This party is the need of the hour to cleanse bad governance but Basaiawmoit would have to spell out how he will achieve the goals spelt out by the VoPP. I recall the Langpih border skirmish not long ago when the then Assam Govt sent some non-Assamese to disturb the peace and harmony of the villagers, even killing four of our people. Basaiawmoit rushed

that same night to West Khasi Hills to console the bereaved families. Unfortunately, he lost the 2018 election from Nongkrem. The pertinent point here is that people don't remember MLAs who strive to do good.

Meghalaya has 60 constituencies with hardly 15,000 voters. Most of these voters are vulnerable to freebies. Whereas in Bihar and UP, an MLA wins over his nearest rival by a margin of over one lakh votes, the victorious MLA in our state manages to win with just 6,000 votes. Yes, the Election Commission can claim to rectify this, but at times what we see is far from the truth. Meghalaya's constituencies have a very small population and the electorate suffer from temporary loss of memory over what had gone wrong in the last five years. Most

of the old stalwarts that have worked for their constituencies and for the state but are not rich enough to pay voters, will not dare to fight the 2023 elections. This rampant growth of money power in politics will ensure that 2023 will be no different. The same set of business people will enter the fray and win.

Having said this, I have no intention to be a wet blanket for the VoPP. In fact, I wish the Party best of luck in this new world when the best of times and the best of everything we cherish in life appears to have vanished.

Yours etc.,  
J Kharmih  
Shillong - I

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"Strength and growth come only through continuous effort and struggle."

— Napoleon Hill

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 103 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2021

### Taking ethnocentrism to desperate heights

THE statement by the General Secretary, Khasi Students' Union that only the indigenous tribes should represent the state in all sporting events defies every norm of democracy. When Meghalaya was born there already existed several communities that have made this state their home since British rule started in 1826. Many families have lived here for generations and Meghalaya is their home as much as it is that of the indigenous tribals. The non-tribals cannot be discriminated against merely because they are not Khasi, Jaintia or Garo. They are Indian citizens and have a right to all the freedoms guaranteed by the Indian Constitution which applies to Meghalaya as it does to every other state of India.

To protect the rights of indigenous tribals the founding fathers of the Constitution granted the Sixth Schedule which privileges tribals in areas such as education, employment, land ownership and taxation amongst others. So much so that the non-tribal residents of Shillong are today restricted to a 100 sq km radius in case they need to build a home for their offsprings. Yet their ancestors have lived, worked and invested their all in this State. Meghalaya is not a separate country that is ruled by political bullies whose diktat has to be obeyed by its citizenry. Such an ill-conceived proclamation can be contested in a court of law as it comes under the ambit of constitutional rights of all citizens to compete in sporting events held in any state of the country. Perhaps the clarion call of the KSU to extend the reservation policy to sports might extend even to healthcare where the call will be "indigenous tribals first."

Pressure groups ride the populist bandwagon to pander to the sentiments of a rabble-rousing constituency they believe will serve them well come election time. Their vision is limited by a narrowness that inhibits them from seeing anything beyond the borders of Meghalaya. Their statements are sequacious and predictable except that they tend to get more strident with the approach of elections although they claim to be students' bodies and should therefore have been more concerned about the abysmal state of education in Meghalaya. This unending chronicle of the "outsider" depriving the indigene of opportunities has to be countered by a new narrative which politicians will not risk undertaking because they cater to vote bank politics. It is civil society and the indigene themselves that have to realise the counter-productivity of protectionism and paranoia to the point that people believe they can't take a step without a crutch. Protectionism debilitates. Competition motivates.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Drawbacks of protectionism

Editor,  
The diktat of the KSU General Secretary Donald Thabab to the powers that be to allow only local athletes to represent the state makes total and complete sense. Since when have we ever allowed merit, calibre and excellence to take precedence over ethnicity? If the rest of humanity believes that evaluation of a person's worth be based solely on issues like quality, calibre, worth and distinction, then the rest of humanity are fools. The KSU through its General Secretary most probably is simply giving vent to the popular slogan "Ha Ri lajong Leh katba mon". It expresses as no other slogan can the mindset that prevails on those who claim to represent the academic standards of Khasi students. For those who do not understand Khasi, I profusely apologise for not being able to give the English translation of the above for the simple reason that it makes no sense.

But I digress and we need to come back to the instructions of the KSU to the Govt on how to run its Sports Department. In confusion and because I wanted to learn I looked up the dictionary and it defined sports as "a form of competitive physical activity". Competition is stressed

upon and is the key word I became more confused. So if merit in sports is based on the concept of success through competition then how does it help our local Khasi, Jaintia and Garo athletes when the KSU demands the elimination of competition to ensure their success? Its oxymoronic. In school we were always reminded of the following "Most people fail in life not because they aimed high and missed but because they aimed low and scored." So one can conclude that the brilliant advice of Donald Thabab of the KSU to our local athletes is to aim low. I rest my case as I have nothing more to add!

I can only conclude by concurring with the proverb that says "shut your mouth if you have nothing of value to say". Nancy Percy the author said "Competition is always a good thing. It forces us to do our best. A monopoly (in our case ethnic reservation) renders people complacent and satisfied with mediocrity." One really hopes that it is not the intention of the KSU to prescribe mediocrity for our sports people. As it is the mediocrity that has taken root in Meghalaya's academic discipline due to reservation has done more than enough harm to our students as most are satisfied and content with achieving only a pass mark. And then why ban the genuine non-tribal athletes of our state from bringing

# Spawning a new economy: Mushrooming of Mushrooms

By K.N.Kumar

China produces 75% of global mushrooms. Indian annual production of five lakh Metric Tonnes (MT) is just 2% of the world's production (estimated to touch 2.1 crore MT by 2026). Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, and Kerala are the top three Mushroom producing states in our country. India's Mushroom production enlarged by 29 times in four years preceding 2018. Meghalaya's mushroom production shot up more than ten times in two and a half years, from 27 MT in 2018 to 287 MT in 2021. Conceded, as a state, we don't count for much as of now, but we shall be - in just a few years. Mark my words!

Mushrooms are edible fungi. Well, not all of them - but gone are the days of foraging mushrooms in the wild; we have begun cultivating them now. The demand for cultivated Mushrooms is rising in the state because they are low in fat and cholesterol while being very rich in Selenium, Potassium, micronutrients, and vitamins. Moreover, mushrooms are a sought-after food the world over for immunity and to minimize the risk of prostate and breast cancers, albeit the tag of their being an elitist food item persists.

The most widely cultivated mushrooms in the world are (1) Oyster, (2) Button, and (3) Shiitake. The Button mushroom is the most preferred type of Mushroom, and 73% of India's mushroom production is of this type. Meghalaya farmers cultivate both Oyster and Button, and since 2019 we have collaborated with a Japanese Company to introduce Shiitake Mushrooms in the state. Mushrooms are sold as fresh, frozen, canned, and dried and powdered forms. The opportunity for Mushroom cultivation in our state is enormous given the insatiable local demand, export potential, scope for value addition and favourable climatic conditions. Against this backdrop, the state government decided to launch an exclusive Mission called the Meghalaya Mushroom Mission (MMM). The Mission was launched on 30th May 2019.

I am a strong advocate of the Mission mode approach because: (1) Missions have more precise targets and are specific in terms of the outputs (2) The Project Officers are clear about their roles and accountability (3) Missions are flexible. Therefore, mid-course corrections are possible and (4) all the Missions we launched in the state are oriented to gener-

ate livelihoods and markets. In contrast, schemes are inflexible, formulated at times with limited contextual understanding, and usually marked by indifferent official accountability. In the absence of measurable metrics, it is tough to evaluate if a particular scheme has been successful or not. That in part explains how the MMM has made significant progress despite the several Covid induced lockdowns over the last two and a half years. The purpose behind this article is to update the citizens about the Mission, its components, achievements, and the benefits accrued to farmers over the last two and a half years.

First, the numbers. When we launched the MMM, the production of Mushrooms in our state was just 27 MT. The target under the Mission was to produce at least 5000 MT by the end of the five-year Mission period, i.e., 31.3.2024 with a total financial projection of Rs. 62.37 crore. The components of the outlay included the civil works, the expansion of the Mushroom Development Centre (MDC), Upper Shillong, a Spawn Production Lab at Jowai, the introduction of the Shiitake mushroom, capacity building of the farmers, etc. In the first two years of the Mission period, the Mushroom production in the state went up to 287.43 MT, which is a ten-fold increase, and 432 new farmers (against a target of 1000 farmers) had been trained and drawn into the Mission. The farmers earned an additional amount of Rs. 11.56 crores (at an average price of about Rs.300/- kg. of Mushrooms) through the Mission, which, to my mind, is a significant additional income to the farming community. The MDC supplied both the Compost and the spawn to the farmers. Spawn availability and its quality are critical to Mushroom production anywhere globally, more so in our state.

A significant challenge we face in the state is the shortage of uncontaminated and high-quality spawn. This constraint is sought to be addressed by constructing a new lab at the MDC to expand the capacity of spawn production. The Government of India sanctioned an amount of Rs. 1.51 crore for this purpose and the new lab will be ready for commissioning by the end of January 2022, after which the spawn production capacity will go

up from the present 12 M.T./year to nearly 100 M.T./year and more farmers can be provided with high-quality mushroom spawn. In final production terms, it should add 2300 M.T./year of Mushrooms to the current production, which will be achieved by the end of the third year of the Mission. Production will begin at Jowai next year once the Spawn Development Laboratory is complete - work for which has already commenced. Thirty clusters of villages, with about 100 farmers each, have been formed (twenty for Oyster and ten for Button Mushroom), so cluster level infrastructure development can be attempted in due course of time. When erected in each cluster, common infrastructure will help the farmers cut down on the logistics costs. Being a tropical mushroom, the Oyster is coming up well in the Garo Hills districts and Ri Bhoi, while Button is doing well in the Khasi & Jaintia Hills districts, being a temperate Mushroom.

The state government alone will not be able to meet the demand for spawn in future. So, youth entrepreneurship will have to be promoted in the spawn production, so the Directorate of Horticulture floated an expression of interest. We were pleasantly surprised to note that 39 potential entrepreneurs responded, and the screening process is currently on. I hope that we will have a reasonably good number of private players producing the mushroom spawn in the state by the end of next year. All these steps will lead to the next big leap in our state's spawn production capacity. The farmer readiness is heart-warming because they see a good market in it, and their keenness to participate in any event or meeting that we organize is exceptionally upbeat. Already ten exclusive Mushroom cooperative societies have been registered in the state. In all this, I will need to mention the dedicated work being done by the team of officers and staff at MDC, Upper Shillong, under the superb leadership of Shri Sumarlang Kharlukhi, Assistant Director. I would be failing in my duty if I did not mention his name at this juncture.

Then, something more exciting is also happening - the state is firmly moving toward Shiitake Mushroom (In Japanese, 'Shii' means 'from a hardwood tree', and 'take' means "mushroom").

A rare and highly-priced mushroom is Shiitake - but difficult to cultivate because of the unique medium it demands, in the form of sawdust chips or blocks of particular kinds of trees. The global shiitake mushroom market is currently valued at 2.6 lakh crore and is expected to grow at 15.31% by 2023. Apart from the exotic cuisine that Shiitake mushrooms are generally used for, they also are used extensively in the pharmaceutical and personal care industries.

In this context, we contacted Japan's YATS corporation, the second-largest producer of Shiitake in Japan and a global exporter. The Corporation was scouting for partnership with our country, and after a few initial parleys with states like Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh, they zeroed in on Meghalaya, signed a tripartite MoU with us for technology transfer, capacity building of our officers and assured buy-back. In addition, the Hill Farmers Union (HFU) was roped in as one of the parties to the MoU to enlist the farmers to grow the feedstock tree - the Chestnut (locally known as Dieng Soh-ot, extensively found in the East and West Khasi Hills and South-West Khasi Hills districts) and the HFU planted 5000 saplings last July. So, we have some distance to cover concerning Shiitake, and I estimate that it will be a year before we may connect all the dots in the production process of Shiitake.

I will now close with a few thoughts: (1) There is massive scope for Mushroom production in the state. The entrepreneurs can consider establishing Mushroom Spawn Centres to supply within our state as also to cater to the whole north-eastern region. (2) There is scope for Mushroom specific composting, which is a stand-alone entrepreneurial activity (3) The ground straw (of wheat and rice) facilitates a higher growth rate and yield than the chopped straw. As of now, farmers do not have any supply of the ground straw which aspect can be undertaken, and (4) Mushrooms are highly amenable for food processing and value addition through canned products, dried products and powdered products. Now that the production is going up in the state, it may well be the time for the entrepreneurs to start thinking in this direction. And who is ready?

The writer is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' Empowerment Commission (MFEC). Email: upoindia@gmail.com

# Modi in blatant appeasement mould confounds his Bhakts

By Sushil Kutty

Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party keep talking about "appeasement", accusing the Opposition, especially the Congress, of "minority appeasement" and coming to power time and again on that plank. The notion was drummed into the electorate that the BJP never engaged in appeasement of any sort. The accusation has

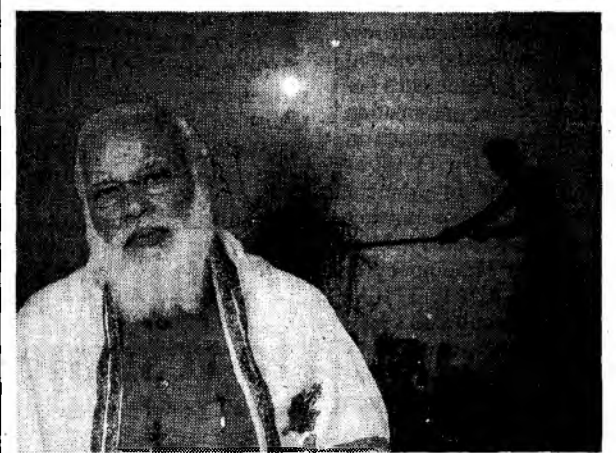
surrounding Modi—basu as well as BJP netas—believe that Modi is setting himself up for PM-for-life in the country north of India. Therefore, Modi can afford to rile the majority and bow before the "few." The majority of the 37% who voted Modi in 2019 are angry he succumbs too easily to pres-

*There is apprehension in the minds of the hardcore right-wing that Modi will give in to those who are asking for a repeal of Article 370 and the CAA. Cries for the reinstatement of 370 and scrapping of CAA are already being heard. Also, the "few" who Modi chose to apologize to and appease are in no mood to relent.*

sure groups.

There is apprehension in the minds of the hardcore right-wing that Modi will give in to those who are asking for a repeal of Article 370 and the CAA. Cries for the reinstatement of 370 and scrapping of CAA are already being heard. Also, the "few" who Modi chose to apologize to and appease are in no mood to relent. They

now come back to bite BJP in the rear. Big numbers of Modi's diehard vote-bank are accusing Modi of going out of his way to appease—in Modi's own estimation—a "small section" of the farming community. Modi's right-wing accusers say Modi cannot be trusted; that if he can throw the "majority of farmers" under the bus for the sake



of a "small section of farmers", what else can he be capable of?

And if this was not appeasement, what is? In fact, they say Modi's "appeasement politics" goes deeper — stating that after winning the 2019 majority, Modi has been taking his right-wing support base for granted, and that while Manmohan Singh only said that the minorities have the first right on national resources, Modi actually practices it.

Modi, these people assert, suffers from an acute case of "Inferiority Complex", which makes him crave for "acceptance" from left-liberal counterparts. They are absolutely sure that Modi is weakening ideologically under the influence of his western peers. Every time

have tasted blood, say Modi's right-wing antagonists. "They know Modi gives in under pressure."

In fact, the right-wing disappointed lot are adamant that the triumphant farmers, before whom Modi sunk his head in his 56" chest, have become emboldened to "blackmail" him, and that Modi continues to appease the "blackmailers"—that Modi's craving for "acceptance" from the left-liberal is chronic.

They say Modi, right from when he became aware—i.e., post-2014—is hungry for approval from the likes of Angela Merkel and Barack Obama, especially seeing his "Gujarat record". The 'bhakt' will not go anywhere—cannot as long as TINA rules Modi's stars.

*There are two ways. One, the BJP should be made to realize that unless the party debunks Modi, they can kiss goodbye to power in 2024. The "Oust Modi" cry should come from within the party. Party leaders other than Amit shah should be targeted and made to feel desperate to boot Modi out.*

an Angela Merkel avoids a Modi handshake, or the UN chief shuns a "Modi bear-hug", Modi is all the more eager to "become like them".

Modi, they state quite seriously, is of no use anymore to the right-wing cause. "Bring Yogi Adityanath," they chorus. This is not bunkum, this is hard truth—a bunch of the right-wing ecosystem is voicing these thoughts. Folks in this group say they fell for Modi's "jhaansa" in 2014—and in 2019—but not anymore. And they are increasingly voluble.

Among them are mainstream media journalists as well so-called "citizen journalists" on Twitter and on Facebook—also retired bureaucrats and right-wing social media influencers. They are convinced Modi has deviated from hardcore Hindutva and that if anything can get Modi on the back-foot, it is the accusation that he is a fanatic Hindutva amplifier.

At the same time, people

The right-wing lot eager for quick implementation of the right-wing agenda believes Modi wouldn't go away himself.

He has to go, though, say the newfound Modi-haters. "But how?" TINA has to be neutralized. There are two ways. One, the BJP should be made to realize that unless the party debunks Modi, they can kiss goodbye to power in 2024. The "Oust Modi" cry should come from within the party. Party leaders other than Amit shah should be targeted and made to feel desperate to boot Modi out.

Modi must be made to realize he is no longer the right-wing darling. "We have given him the power to overrule us, the electorate that got him the chance to enjoy the perks of power, of all the tughlaki farmaans, it is too rich to digest," the "andh bhakts" are absolutely sure that Modi has to be edged out. Modi's appeasement politics has to be nipped in the bud. (IPA Service)

#### Drawbacks of protectionism

Editor,  
The diktat of the KSU General Secretary Donald Thabab to the powers that be to allow only local athletes to represent the state makes total and complete sense. Since when have we ever allowed merit, calibre and excellence to take precedence over ethnicity? If the rest of humanity believes that evaluation of a person's worth be based solely on issues like quality, calibre, worth and distinction, then the rest of humanity are fools. The KSU through its General Secretary most probably is simply giving vent to the popular slogan "Ha Ri lajong Leh katba mon". It expresses as no other slogan can the mindset that prevails on those who claim to represent the academic standards of Khasi students. For those who do not understand Khasi, I profusely apologise for not being able to give the English translation of the above for the simple reason that it makes no sense.

laurels, together I may add, with our locals who earn through merit to represent the state? My final request is for Heaven's sake please don't provide unnecessary ammunition for the likes of Vicky Dey to take pot shots and expose us in bad light to the rest of the world.

Yours etc.,  
Maimai Diengdoh,  
Viang email

#### Heartbreaking demand

Editor,  
The demand made by the KSU general secretary that no one from outside the Khasi Jaintia and Garo communities should be selected to represent the State of Meghalaya (ST Nov 21 2021) in sporting events is highly unfortunate and demoralizing. This demand appears to have been made without due consideration of all the aspects and also appears to have been made in a fit of anger. This is uncalled for and is not expected from a leader of the youth body. This demand for exclusion will adversely affect the morale of the youths of other communities besides tearing off the social fabric. We who are born and brought up in Meghalaya, love this state dearly. We surely want to bring laurels to this state in every field. Why is it that just before celebrating 50 years of statehood comes this demand for banning other com-

munities from representing Meghalaya in sports activities? How will it benefit the student community? I hope the General Secretary of the students' body will consider it fit to modify his demand soon. The slogan, "Sab Ka Saath Sub Ka Vikas," has to be implemented in right earnest.

Yours etc.,  
K Chettri  
Shillong -2

#### A sincere request to NEHU

Editor,  
The Education sector is the most devastated by Covid 19. While there's no denying the fact that there is no substitute for a classroom with a teacher and the students, we but have no other option rather than to resort to online classes which have become order of the day. Leaving aside the unpleasant hurdles like the smartphone divide where only 8% of Indians can afford, plus the connectivity problem etc, online classes creates great disparities. Learning online is not deep and conceptual. The teachers involved in the class cannot predict the doubts in the minds of students without seeing their expressions.

Contrary to what people who are not in the teaching line believe, the teacher does

do homework the night before he/she goes to meet the students. Teachers think of the right kind of materials to feed the students from daily life experiences to make the class lively and fruitful. This is true for all teachers irrespective of whether they are teaching KG classes, secondary or higher secondary schools, colleges or universities. Sadly, online classes lack these valuable advantages.

The other most serious issue right now is that online examinations have no invigilators to stop students from copying from text books or Google. An example is that of the impersonators caught during last NEET 2021 in Maharashtra.

What our children got through this online examination was dissatisfaction in all aspects. Many who take exams as sacrosanct which it should be, are victimized by those who couldn't care less about the sanctity of the examination. They have everything in them to answer so much they could score 98%. Let me tell readers that two boys who topped during the Pre-Covid University exams failed to get seats in NEHU as admission was given to students appearing for online exams with inflated marks granted by their own professors who are more interested to admit into NEHU their students as well as to advertise their own colleges to attract more students.

This online exam defect that had victimized students is also felt in Delhi. Brilliant Delhiites could not get admission to renowned colleges like Hindu College, Hansraj, Jesus and Mary College. Though they scored 98.5 in their subjects of interest, the marks secured were too less compared to the marks of students from Kerala, all of whom scored 100%. So they had to move out of Delhi. This is a sorry state of affairs breeding victims of an examination pattern that lacks uniformity of evaluation and marking. Of course, two professors of Delhi colleges did console the Delhi girls and boys (TV discussion) that from next year, there would be a general entrance test for all students. But why not now as the entrance test is not going to buy time?

As a concerned parent, it is my sincere and humble request that NEHU authorities conduct the upcoming odd semester exam in offline mode since colleges have started offline classes and have even conducted internal examinations in the offline mode.

Yours etc.,  
Marbianglang Rymbai  
Shillong-2

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"Hard work without talent is a shame,  
but talent without hard work is a tragedy."

--- Robert Half

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 104 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2021

### Missing: kinetic response

TRUTH remains as truth while falsehood pales with time. The observation by senior Congressman Manish Tewari about the November 2008 serial attacks on landmarks in Mumbai deserves special attention. His take is that the then UPA government headed by the Congress party failed to adequately respond to the attacks. In a soon-to-be published book, titled 10 Flashpoints, 20 Years, Tewari stresses that there are times when action should speak louder than words and there should have been a "kinetic" response to Pakistan for what it did. No doubt, it was a moment of shame for India. The attackers played mayhem in Taj Mahal Palace hotel, a prominent café in Colaba and at VT-CST railway station, almost unhindered. The Indian security forces did not have the training or wherewithal to face such an attack. They cut a sorry figure in full view of the television viewers around the world. Nearly 170 people – including the high and mighty inside the hotel – were killed and some 500 injured at the hands of about 10 Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists who acted in concert. In sum, it was the Indian leadership's weakness that got eloquently displayed.

Manish Tewari is a parliamentarian, former Union Minister and a spokesperson for the Congress party for a considerably long time. He chose to speak out after about 13 years and, curiously, such comments were not made even by those in the Opposition. The Indian political establishment is, overall, caught in a sense of lethargy and there is a spectacular deficit when it comes to protecting and furthering national interests. India is a nation on the defensive – because those who lead India from the front did not show the courage to confront. Exception was when Indira Gandhi chose to act effectively by moving the army to East Pakistan to help the people there to declare Independence from Islamabad and form Bangladesh at the height of a Mukti Bahini offensive against the Pakistani army. Dr Manmohan Singh was a dove; Narendra Modi did execute a surgical strike and the Balakot bombing, but both were at best touch-and-go offensives. In Ladakh, it was a response to Chinese aggression.

It is no secret that Manish Tewari, a leader from Punjab, is among the 'Group of 23' in the Congress party that has been seeking a rejuvenation of the Congress party and elections to its top posts. He is not in the good books of the party. Be that as it may, truth must be stated – and stated loudly too. Tewari chose to call a spade a spade.

# The blame game has begun

By Albert Thyrniang

The BJP national vice president in charge of BJP Meghalaya, M Chuba Ao triggered a controversy by branding the 'regional parties with national outlook' with 'begging bowls' in Delhi. The remark evoked wide reactions from the state's political circles. The Chief Minister and NPP chief, Conrad Sangma slammed the saffron leader for targeting his party and the leaders in the MDA government, deeming Ao's observation demeaning to the state. The "insult" prompted UDP general secretary, Jemino Mawthoh to ask the BJP to walk out of the coalition if it thinks its government at the centre fills up the bowls of regional parties. PDF president, Banteidor Lyngdoh, while coming down heavily on the 'unacceptable' language states that approaching the Centre is not begging. The Opposition Congress too condemned the 'begging bowl' statement.

The statement of the BJP national vice-president is political. The state is already in election mode. Ao is only campaigning for the BJP. A paraphrase of the comment of the saffron worker reads, "The NPP (regional party with a national outlook), the UDP, PDF, HSPDP are in power. They only approach the BJP government in the national capital for funds. Hence in 2023 it makes sense to vote the BJP so that intermediaries are side-lined. We will provide the funds ourselves." The political statement, however, has truth. The chief minister himself acknowledges that majority of the state funds come the Centre. The very reason the NPP, UDP, PDF and others aligned with the BJP in 2018 is for funds. On several occasions the chief minister justified his rapport with the BJP, seen as anti-Christian and anti-minorities, in the name of 'funds' for the state. He defended the inclusion of the BJP in his government in order to avail of central funds. He explained his cosy relationship with the prime minister, Narendra Modi, union home minister, Amit Shah and Assam chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma in the interests of the state. About a month ago, the chief minister eulogised the BJP leaders and said they are interested in the welfare of minorities, especially Christians. He closes his mind on anti-conversion laws aimed at Christians, the anti-minority CAA, the abolition of article 370 that targets a particular community and the statements of Himanta Biswa

Sarma that Muslims, Christians and others have their roots in Hinduism. One is not sure of others, but tribals certainly have no ancestries in Hinduism.

Having befriended the 'nationalist' and 'communal' party by sacrificing the ideology of his party for 'financial' reasons there is no point in crying foul against the 'begging bowl' comment. Having 'begged' Delhi the state government has to account for implementation of central projects. As the Assembly elections approach, the BJP will attack MDA government more on central funds. The blame game has just begun among partners with no one taking responsibility for failure. Deputy chief minister, Prestone Tynsong has already directed the 'young' BJP Meghalaya in charge to go for training, perhaps to MATI as he advised TUR leader Angela Rangad, for allegedly speaking nonsense.

While it has fired the 'begging bowl' salvo, it is actually the BJP which has made the regional parties 'beggars' in exchange for aligning with it. In the North East the BJP achieved its mission of 'Congress-mukt' because the ruling party in Delhi promised 'development' (funds) for the region to regional parties. The regional parties fell to the BJP propaganda that it would usher in unprecedented development and that unlimited funds would flow ceaselessly to the eight states. The North-East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) was formed to unite regional parties against the Congress. The BJP roped in the Asom Gana Parishad, the Bodoland People's Front, the Naga People's Front, the Sikkim Democratic Front and the People's Party of Arunachal, and lest we forget, the NPP and UDP from Meghalaya to promote the 'interest' of North East. These parties ignored and are still overlooking the ideology of the BJP for the cause Ao stated.

The BJP subscribes to the ideology of Hindutva. Recently, Congress leader Salman Khurshid compared Hindutva with Islamic terrorism outfits. The Hindutva outfits protested but ended up confirming exactly what Khurshid has written in his new book, "Sunrise over Ayodhya," by vandalising his house and setting it on fire. Who would be so intolerant as to resort to violence? Only extremists would do it. The likes of NPP, UDP and PDF

have helped the BJP in Meghalaya by embracing it as a partner in 2018. The rationale was the fund appeal. In 2023 the BJP might be a bigger mate and might gradually overtake the 'regional party with a national outlook' and the other 'pucca' regional entities. They had opted for the friendship model and conveniently forgotten that funds to the states cannot be stopped on the basis of political rivalry. This is a constitutional provision. So the TMC in West Bengal, the Congress in Rajasthan and other states, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir during the 370 era, obtain funds from the centre although they oppose the BJP, ideologically.

However, since the BJP government dispenses the funds it is within its rights to demand that the money is put to good use. It is only natural for the masters to say, 'those who beg don't know how to utilise the resources we provide and therefore let us govern directly.' The NPP, UDP, PDF are/will be responsible for the advancement of the Hindutva ideology in the state under the guise of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayaas'. They have themselves to blame. Worse, if enlightened, the voters might blame them for the same.

The BJP is under an illusion that 'fund attraction' would make it a bigger player post 2023. The party is desperate for not making headway in Meghalaya. Since its entry into state politics in the early 1990s, the party bagged three seats only in 1998. The party has two MLAs at present who are regular turncoats. It has failed to groom any local leader on its own. The ideology of the 'Hindi Belt' party has repulsive effects in these hills. Indications point to a reduced tally in 2023. The best the 'country's largest' party can do is to 'sheep steal' from its most hated rival, the Congress and the 'beggars' NPP and regional parties. On its own it has nothing to showcase. The constant tall assertion of Congress and other party men rushing in to contest under the Lotus symbol in the next elections might come to naught.

Keeping an eye on other parties is not limited to the BJP. Others too are 'other' oriented. It is pathetic that parties have reduced their activities to poaching. It am-

ply manifests their weakness. It abundantly demonstrates that they can't rely on their strength. It means they have not worked hard to build their bases. The best option is to win via the short cut way. The smartest trick is to succeed by breaking others.

M Chuba Ao hails from Nagaland. More than Meghalaya the BJP is a key ally in the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party-led government in that state. In June last year the governor, RN Ravi, out of frustration due to the sorry state of affairs, shot off a letter to Neiphiu Rio, reminding the chief minister of the "siphoning off a large chunk of government funds meant for development" to armed gangs who run their own 'governments'. The four-page letter alleged that several national highways projects (funded by the Centre) are stalled if 5-7% of the project cost is not given to armed groups who kidnap and assault project engineers if there was a delay. The governor narrates the grim reality, "They have informed that construction company officials are summoned to the Dimapur offices of the armed gangs for payments and negotiations... Sometimes these unlawful activities [take place] in the presence of senior officials of the State government including the Chief Secretary, Home Commissioner and the DGP."

What has Ao to say on this brazen misuse of central funds in Nagaland? Will he raise his voice in his home state too? He resides in Dimapur where the offices of the 'armed gangs' operates with impunity. As a partner, the BJP too is responsible for the central funds ending up in the kitty of extortionists. The BJP is certainly aware of this criminal activity. But it is silent on the issue. It has not insisted on taking the Rio government to task. It has not demanded action against top state government officials who officially oblige the 'gangs'. The central government and the investigating agencies, who allegedly target mainly political opponents, are surely in the know of the blatant 'diversion' of central funds. Why trumpet the unproven improper implementation of central projects in Meghalaya? In Meghalaya too the BJP can direct the agencies to scrutinise the centrally sanctioned projects. Nothing of this sort will happen. Ao's utterance is only part of the ugly politics as the state gears towards 2023.

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## Modi surprises supporters, opponents and the farmers Farm laws repeal to reshape poll strategies

By Kalyani Shankar

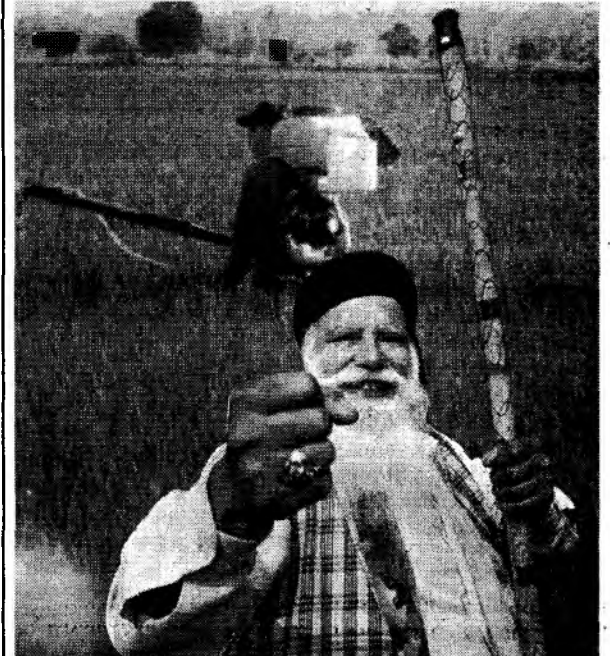
Prime Minister Narendra Modi is not known for stooping. However, political compulsions made him roll back the three contentious farm laws last week. He has realized that whenever political opposition and mass movements come together, it impacts politics. As a shrewd politician, he chose to retreat. In his national television address on Friday he apologized, "Today, I beg the forgiveness of my countrymen and say with a pure heart and honest mind that perhaps there was some shortcoming."

Modi sprang a surprise on the striking farmers, his devotees as well as his opponents. At one stroke, he had taken away the central issue of attack from the opposition in the upcoming Parliament session and the Assembly polls to seven states. The announcement on the eve of the winter session of Parliament

a strong organization. For instance, Congress is presently in the fourth position in U.P. It can only improve its position and not win the state. The Samajwadi Party was hoping to use the farmer's agitation as a central plank. The party is also getting ready to align with the Rashtriya Lok Dal, backed by the Jats. Now it has to rework its poll strategy. The divided opposition might result in a hung Assembly.

The Congress could have won – Punjab easily, but the Gandhi siblings have messed up the whole thing by getting rid of Captain Amarinder Singh last month. Captain has floated his party and is getting ready for an alliance with the BJP. The Captain might not win the polls, but he could damage the Congress. The rise of the Aam Admi Party is also a worry.

The Udham Singh Na-



is also well-timed. Modi's followers were more confused than the opponents. They had been defending the farm laws with such fervour that they felt a sense of betrayal by his climb down. But Modi knows what he's doing even at the cost of weakening his image.

The rollback has won him laurels and brickbats. The pro-reform lobby in India and abroad is stunned by Modi's climb down as they apprehend that it will halt the reform process, which would have brought new technology and investment. They were banking on Modi that he would initiate reform, particularly in labour and agriculture.

gar district in Uttarakhand, where a large number of Sikh farmers live, was an essential hub of the agitation.

The state also does not have a strong chief ministerial face. So far the Congress and the BJP have been ruling alternately.

The opposition in Haryana is flexing its muscles and can change the poll scene. But the main opposition, Congress, continues to remain disunited, facing factionalism and indiscipline.

In Himachal Pradesh, the Congress is upbeat because of its victory in the recent bye-elections. The BJP faced a complete rout in the recent by-polls. It also lacks a strong chief minister.

Goa is attracting outside

"The pro-farmer lobby is delighted at the victory of the farmers, who ran their protests for a year bearing cold and heat and also covid. The opposition too thinks that their support to the farmers has won the day."

The pro-farmer lobby is delighted at the victory of the farmers, who ran their protests for a year bearing cold and heat and also covid. The opposition too thinks that their support to the farmers has won the day.

Incidentally, the rollback could result in a change of poll strategy -- both for the BJP and the opposition. The BJP is ruling in Manipur, Goa, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat, and the Congress is ruling only in Punjab. Winning Uttar Pradesh is crucial for the BJP. The party is happy that the opposition is not united and has started intensifying the campaign and activating the party machinery. The BJP has enough money and muscle power and also well-oiled party machinery.

The reaction from the opposition is interesting. The Congress is beating its chest on the vision of Rahul Gandhi, who predicted that Modi has to repeal the farm laws. But winning the poll-bound states is tough without

parties like the Trinamool Congress and Aam Admi Party. Though Congress emerged as the number one party in 2017, the BJP snatched away the state by forming a coalition. The same thing happened in Manipur, and Congress lost the game.

Gujarat, the home state of both the Prime Minister and Home Minister Amit Shah, has already seen a change of chief minister. Still, it lacks a solid chief ministerial face. So is the case with Congress. The fight will be tight.

The farmer's issue is still not closed. The farm unions have decided to continue their stir and demand a constitutional guarantee on Minimum Support Prices, repeal of the electricity law, and action against those behind the Lakhimpur Kheri killings. They also demand compensation for the six hundred and odd farmers who died in this struggle. Will the government yield on all these issues? We have to wait and see. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### NEIGRIHMS: Hospital for the poor

Editor, NEIGRIHMS is located at Mawdiangdiang around 15 Km from Shillong. It can be approached from Umpling as well through Itshyrtat gate beyond which the road connects the NH6. This health care centre has proven to be the saviour of our poor in every aspect, be it fees for diagnostics, treatment and hospital fees. The private diagnostics centres are too expensive (almost 4 to 5 times the cost) compared to this hospital. And with unsavoury stories on social media of Covid treatment in private hospitals and of high inconceivable cost NEIGRIHMS is a boon.

NEIGRIHMS is fully equipped in all departments required and manned by specialists and well-trained doctors. Even patients from Bangladesh through the hospital.

However although the distance to this health care institution is not much the problem is with accessibility due to the traffic snarls all along the roads leading to NEIGRIHMS. With the odd-even arrangement taxi fares have shot up five-

fold and the shortest route through Umpling via Rynjah is now out of bounds and has been for the last two years as the Bailey bridge was dismantled with the idea of reinforcing it with cement. This was much before Covid threw us out of gear. No one has any idea why the bridge is left unfinished even though it is less than 50 metres in length.

With the advent of Covid the Government got ample excuse to leave it incomplete and even today it remains so. The people of Umpling people suffered a great deal as they now have to take the route via Lapalang which means many more kilometres added to the distance. It is nightmare especially for school children and for ambulances headed for NEIGRIHMS.

It is very unfortunate that our PWD minister is blind to the woes of not only the people of Umpling but most importantly the patients who can only afford to be treated at NEIGRIHMS. When the NPP candidate won the Mawryngkneng seat, the people had some hope as one of his agenda was to resume the work of constructing the Umpling bridge. Alas! till date there is no sign of his sincerity at all. Election promises begin before polling and

get hijacked on the day of swearing in. Last heard the brand new MLA had said he would turn Umpling into a model village. Perhaps that will happen if he is re-elected in 2023.

Yours etc.,  
James Kharmih  
Shillong 1

#### Of VoPP Party

Editor, I have just gone through the letter to the editor, "VoPP is born; all the best" by J. Kharmih (ST November 22, 2021). My view is that we, the 20,35,060 voters of Meghalaya, do not expect the miniscule brand new VoPP under the firebrand leadership of Ardent Basa-iawmoit to work miracles to restore the honour and dignity of Meghalaya during and after the upcoming general elections in 2023 or even after it.

First and foremost, there is no honour and dignity in politics and governance in Meghalaya so far; not since 1972. At least we have not witnessed that even once. The VoPP, since its launch a few weeks ago has spelt out that one of its top priorities is to provide the people of Meghalaya politics with a difference; clean politics and clean governance. We hope that this objective can

be fulfilled by the new party if it can convince the people, is trusted by them and is finally elected by the voters of Meghalaya.

We still remember that in earlier years Ardent Basa-iawmoit had toured to many places in Khasi and Jaintia Hills to preach and convince people to vote for politicians that are clean and above all free from corrupt practices. Even church organisations especially frontal wings of churches were vehement in creating awareness among voters to distance themselves from taking bribes for votes. But, in spite of these exercises voters are still inclined to vote for candidates who can provide them with hard cash and freebies during elections. On the contrary, quite a few religious leaders including pastors, priests and elders unashamedly hobbled with candidates, especially with the rich ones, in the name of their parishes, presbyteries, zones or branches and seized the opportunity to ask for pecuniary help at the height of the elections.

I only hope that with the VoPP adding to the crowd of parties in the political arena the Meghalaya voters will have more options to choose from the existing parties. However, this means more fragmentation of votes

which will enable some lucky candidates or parties to win the elections or the other way around.

I agree with J. Kharmih that the 2023 election results will favour those who have money power to buy not only the votes but also the voters because without the voters the candidates cannot get the votes.

Another aspect that I want to correctly place on record here is that the average number of voters in Meghalaya in each of the 60 constituencies is around 26,000 and not 15,000.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
St. Journalist,  
Meghalaya

#### Online exams lack credibility

Editor, I agree with Marbianglang Rymbai (ST, November 23, 2021) that the NEHU model of offline examination has vitiated the quality and standard of education in the State. No matter on what platform an examination is taken, online examinations can be especially vulnerable to cheating like screen sharing with other exam takers and doing online searches during the exam.

NEHU in its online

examinations conducted from 2020 did not even use any Online Examination Platform- an examination which does not qualify to be called an Online Examination System or Open Book Examination, where teachers devise questions that require students to answer in more analytical and critical ways, thus encouraging a higher order of thinking skills in students. The type of questions in the recently held online exam of NEHU are of a lower order based on Bloom's Taxonomy.

As a parent my main concern is the consequences of online classes and examinations on the academic intelligence and emotional life of our students. I urge NEHU and its stakeholders to revert to offline examination in order to ensure the highest standard of academic honesty. I don't see any reason why offline exams cannot be held when most college students have been vaccinated.

Yours etc.,  
Stevenson Marboh  
Shillong-4

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"Personality is lower than partiality."

— Goldwin Smith

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.106 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2021

What are MDA Govt's priorities?

EVERY Government needs to set priorities and goals, else it will be tilting at windmills and achieve no measurable goals. For the general public, good roads with proper drains, a responsive and accessible healthcare system, clean water supply and good educational infrastructure are critical. After that comes power, agriculture & allied activities and employment generation. It will be educative to know how many youth have been employed in sectors other than the government on account of the State having created its engine of progress. Unemployment is causing heartburns among our youth and many have taken the easy way out and turn to substance abuse.

The tragedy that besets Meghalaya is that no government has set its priorities since 1972. If roads are a priority then the State needs to list out the important national highways and ensure these are taken up by the national agencies within a definite timeline. Internal roads everywhere are in a mess. There is no single model to look up to. The Power sector is one messy deal and sooner than later the MeECL will have to be privatized if we are to get regular power supply. There's a limit to how much loan a state run Corporation can avail when it is lagging behind in repayment of previously availed loans. Meghalaya is just biding its time like a plane that runs on autopilot.

Some people are in the Government to serve their personal interests and even if they don't make it in 2023 they and their families are sorted for the rest of their lives. Such people have used the Government without any concern about its public image. They have nothing to lose after all. What also stands in the way of Government setting out priorities is that some of the most important Departments such as Health, Education, PWD, PHE, Agriculture, Art & Culture have no policy to guide them. While there is a case for not being imprisoned by policy to the point that one cannot move out of it, flexibility is called for when a certain policy has outrun its course and needs to be reimagined. But to start without any policy is to allow arbitrariness to set in. Arbitrary decision-making always lends itself to manipulation. Look at the Health Department for instance. There is no transparent policy of allocation of medical seats to students that have cleared NEET. Normally toppers should be allowed to opt for a medical college of their choice, keeping in mind the reservation policy. But this has not happened in 50 years of statehood. Perhaps the New Year's Resolution for the MDA Govt would be to put together a think-tank comprising development specialists, (both rural and urban), economists, educationists, city planners, agriculturists, et al to tour the length and breadth of the state and come up with policy proposals.

Needed better sports infrastructure, not reservation for tribals

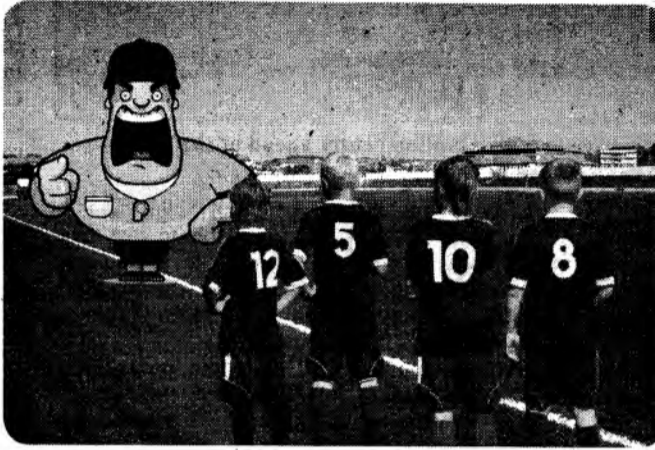
By Bhogtoram Mawroh

Some days ago, there was a demand made by the Khasi Students Union that there should be 100% reservation for Khasi-Jaintia and Garo athletes in all sports teams representing Meghalaya. Specifically, the Meghalaya Cricket Association and Meghalaya Basketball Association were mentioned by the pressure group. I have a very close association with one of the sports mentioned, cricket. I played the game at a semi-professional level for many years. I played for my locality, Nongmynsong, and then played for United XI, with whom I won the Super Division twice and was selected for the Shillong district team that won the state district championship. I was supposed to play in a district tournament in Assam but I could not for some unavoidable reasons. But, after I started on my PhD, I could not give much time to the game, although I did play a little for the university.

I am not one to brag, but I was a pretty good player. In fact, the team I played for had two cricketers who had played at the national level. Mark Ingty (a Karbi) was the opening bowler. A little wayward in the early overs once he got his rhythm, he was a wonderful bowler. Mark became famous for taking the wicket of Sourav Ganguly when he was playing for Assam in the Ranji Trophy. Then there was JJ Lamare, who also played for Assam and, if I am not mistaken, was selected for the Duleep Trophy as well. During one of our get-togethers somebody was telling him how he could actually be a good option as an all-rounder for the Indian team. Of course, that never happened but those were the days when we still had dreams.

There was Asa Warjri, who was a gentleman and the late Maw, who was rough on the outside but a very kind person on the inside. Maw was one of the best footballers at one point of time and was in the same camp with Renedy Singh. He would tell stories of how they were mistreated for being from the North East. While Renedy persisted and became a legend in Indian football, Maw came back and did his all to intimidate the local batsmen. Players were truly scared of him. Mark Ingty was quicker in the air but Maw would hit the gloves really hard (I was the first-choice wicket-keeper of the

team). And he had a beautiful out-swing. My favourite player, however, was someone who was known for being the laziest in the squad. His name was Bishan Thapa. It was Bishan who invited me to play for United XI and he was a good friend both on and off the field. But he was lazy as hell. When he ran it seemed like he was posing for a photo shoot with hips swaying in both directions as if he was running in slow motion. He was the opening batsman and a spin bowler.



Keeping wicket to him was fun because he never really turned the ball much. Believe it or not, he was also the state badminton champion. How he managed that with the poor work ethic we saw on the cricket field is beyond me. Bishan is a Nepali born and brought up in Shillong, i.e., he is a local. But he was not the only one. We also had Purjit and Surojit (Bengali brothers) who played for (if I am not mistaken) Royal CC, who were United XI's fierce rivals. Both were really good batsmen and, from what I hear, musicians. Music and bhadralok Bengali go hand in hand, so I am not surprised. Then there was Nikhelish (or was it Nitesh) and the two Nepali bowlers who were really quick. One of the Nepali bowlers I believe had a suspect action and the other bowled like Lasith Malinga. I can say with pride that neither of them got me out.

My biggest competitor was this wicketkeeper, I forget the name, who was a Muslim. Now that I am no longer playing, I have no qualms in admitting that he was a better keeper than I. My other competitors were a Nepali and a Khasi wicket-keeper. Both, I believe, were selected for Meghalaya later on. I did not play much against Raj Biswa but he was around when I was playing. He was a really

good batsman and played for Tripura where he scored big runs. Two seasons ago he was a leading figure in the Meghalaya team. Non-tribals in Meghalaya cricket have a very long history. I know that because I was part of it. But the presence of non-tribals is not limited to cricket. At one point of time, I was into taekwondo and I participated in a regional tournament in Tezpur and a national tournament in Shillong. I was not a very good fighter and I remember one particular fight

where I was kicked so many times in the face that I had to apply a hot towel after the bout. But I am proud to say I won two fights in my life, one with an injured leg. One thing I noticed was that the majority of fighters and instructors were non-tribals, mostly Nepali and Bihari. In fact, the pioneer of taekwondo in Meghalaya was Luthre Lohar, a Nepali, who was 7th Dan black belt. He passed away recently, which was a big loss to the taekwondo fraternity. My only regret is that I could not meet him in person. I was so much into martial arts that at one point I thought I would get my black belt and start my own club.

Another sport in which I tried my hand at was football. In my college I was the goalkeeper of the class. I also kept goal for my locality during a local shoot-out tournament as well. One thing which was very clear with football was that there were no non-tribals in the team. When we look at the Meghalaya team this becomes a little more striking as only Khasi players make up the side. But it does not mean that there are no non-tribals at all. When my friend, Rev Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh, reminisces about football of the past, he will list non-tribal players who were really good. Even now there are some who are playing the game. Padam

Chettri is the best goalkeeper in Meghalaya, at least the last time I saw him play. In fact, he has been playing for the state team for some time now.

From all that I have shared there are some important points that emerge. Non-tribals have contributed a lot to sports in the state. They did not wander in from outside the state but were born and brought up here. The demand by the KSU that only tribals should represent Meghalaya is unfair, since it will deprive the state of this local talent. What would be more useful is to put pressure on the state government to improve sports facilities in Meghalaya. Since more than 80% of the population is tribal, if the sports situation improves, by default a lot of the athletes who will benefit will be tribals. But if infrastructure and other elements are not improved then it will not matter if we have 100% reservation.

Coming back to football, where the overwhelming majority of players are tribals and Khasis in particular, the KSU should find out how much players in the lower leagues are paid. What happens to them if they get injured and their careers are stalled? First Ground in Polo is still not complete and games are being played in horrendous conditions when it rains. One day I hope to see an athlete from Meghalaya win a medal in the Olympics, preferably someone from the Pynursla region. Will asking for 100% reservation accomplish that? No!

I believe our tribal athletes are as good as anyone, provided they receive the appropriate support. Since we are a tribal majority state, we don't need reservation. If this was the mainland, I can understand the demand. With the discrimination against low castes and tribals rampant in the mainland, they would need reservation. Here we should be demanding vociferously that sports in Meghalaya should be encouraged and improved by getting the best facilities for our athletes. Scouting should be improved to source talent that lies hidden in many of our villages. But, at the same time, eligible non-tribals should be allowed to showcase their talent and bring laurels to the state. Only then can we become a sporting powerhouse in the country.

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'Ill-fated governance'

By OR Challam

Meghalaya being a unique matrilineal society has not only flaunted the fame and popularity of its inimitable landscape and its panoramic topographical composition, but most importantly of its complex and distinct ethnic cultures and traditions. The land has three beautiful and distinctive state festivals showcasing the uniqueness and richness of its divine traditions and heritage while each exhibiting its religious

remain unaided by our state government. Thanks to our Honorable Chief Ministers for all the lips service that he has rendered to us.

As a veteran and a concerned citizen of the State, I fail to understand as to why our Chief Minister chose to open his eyes in Garo Hills while closing his eyes towards Jaintia and Khasi hills? Being a secular state, why is such injustice and bias being adopted by our Chief

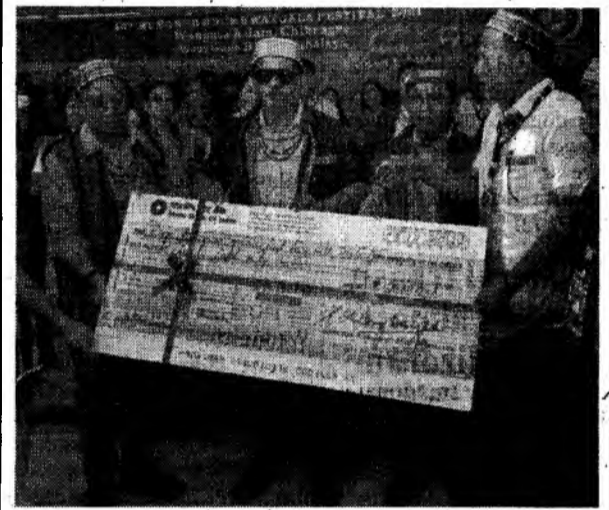
"The Chief Minister and his government are all set to achieve 'another feather in the hat' out of all the false claims and fake promises fooling the residents with nothing but false hope."

and cultural significance. Every resident of the state feels proud to be the sons and daughters of this land embedding union and oneness with peace and harmony amidst diverse customs and practices. However, others in power are playing governance favoritism for their political and business interests.

The Chief Minister and his government are all set to achieve 'another feather in

Minister and his government even in promoting our very own cultures and traditions which in other words are our sole 'identity'?

I personally feel a sense of shame and humiliation to witness the drama being presented by the Chief Minister. Where are all the legislators from Khasi and Jaintia Hills? What are you all doing? I appeal to all the Members of the House from Jaintia and Khasi Hills to at



least for once in the political history of the state, stand together and fight for the same cause. If the legislators of the Garo hills are all standing in union for the progress and development of the region, I wonder what our Khasi and Jaintia legislators have been doing all this while. Stop playing the 'Yes card' you have all been doing till date. You have been elected to represent the public before the Government, so do your duty and stop playing second fiddle.

Apart from the above cultural agenda, this government is regularly practicing and indulging in partisanship while appointing or

"In the modern era of western influences, preservations and conservation of the indigenous practices and traditions are of utmost urgency besides popularizing and displaying their uniqueness to the rest of the world."

urgency besides popularizing and displaying their uniqueness to the rest of the world. Government aided and financial grants for such festivals should be prioritized irrespective of ethnic differences.

The Chief Minister in his latest visit to the Wangala dance Festival celebrated a few weeks back handed over a special assistance of fifty lakhs as a means of popularizing and preserving the festival. I personally extend my warmest regards to all our dearest brothers and sisters in Garo hills but the question is - What about the other two state festivals? Aren't both festivals also equitably entitled for the special assistance Mr. Chief Minister? Is favoritism being played here?

The two other state festivals of the Jaintias and the Khasis who are collaborating and synchronizing in preparation for the grand celebration of the nation's 75th years of Independence along with the Meghalaya 50th Statehood Day however,

assigning officers based on the 'puppet-centric mode'. While some District Heads or Departmental Heads have remained untouched in the same post for several years, other 'not so pliable' officers get prematurely punched at regular intervals during their service, in spite of being the fittest in their line of work. The latest development is being witnessed in East Jaintia Hills district with the recent premature transfer of its Deputy Commissioner who barely served for 14 months for reasons best known to the Chief Minister and his Government. This very practice has sabotaged the progress and development of the people of the District but has only helped to promote the business interests of the people in power. It is high time for those 'Puppet Officers' who have been playing a marionette role to realize their very own self respect and dignity of independently working and serving the State for the interests of the people and not for their 'Political Masters.'

Letters to the Editor

Congress a sinking ship

I have been a patron of various local vernacular and English newspapers related to various political news going around. As an admirer and a staunch supporter of the Congress I am appalled at the undemocratic way the AICC had to undertake in appointing the President to the MPCC without taking the views of party members and grassroots workers. Such an attitude instead of expanding the party's base has begun to erode due to the indifference of the party officials towards the needs of the people. The childish statement by the new MPCC President on his remarks to Dr. Mukul Sangma who was once a close party colleague, shows that Mr Pala has no real interest in resolving matters amicably but has exposed party matters in public domain. Petty politics within the Congress has hurt the feelings of party workers and has now casts doubts on whether there is any chance for the Congress to win leave alone forming a government as a single majority party. The remarks by the MLA of Laitumkrah Constituency that the Congress would be willing to form a coalition with any party including the NPP if there is mutual understanding, has itself cast doubts. This raises the question of party principles and if in 2023 such a tie-up does evolve then why should people vote for the

Congress; they would better vote for NPP or BJP or any other Party rather than the Congress knowing fully well the plans of the party to form a coalition which is absurd. Hope people will realise this treachery before it's too late.

Yours etc., Patrick Wann, Shillong-14

India needs less government, not more

The lifting of millions of Indians out of poverty after the country's economic reforms in 1991 should have delivered a decisive blow to those who argue that capitalism exploits the poor. Thanks to deregulation, there has been a significant rise in India's standard of living during the past 15 years. Unfortunately, the same arguments against the free-market persist. Yet the problem is government, not the market.

If governments faced the same discipline that private corporations face, the next election would result in all of India's politicians being voted out. In spite of grandiose promises, hardly anyone doubts that India continues to remain near the top of the world in corruption and inefficiency. The sad reality is that India has fallen behind the East Asian nations. The subcontinent holds the dubious distinction of having the world's largest number of poor people,

despite the crores of rupees spent to "stimulate" development. The reforms of 1991 allowed many a chance at life for the middle-class. For the average person, the relaxation of investment laws has meant access to a wider variety of goods and services at cheaper prices. In the past Indians faced restrictions on the import of foreign cars, and were forced to buy inferior local models such as the Ambassador. Now they have the freedom to choose a Toyota, a Honda or even a BMW, if they so desire. The influx of new brands has meant more productive jobs, as foreign companies have set up factories locally.

Especially now when the government-induced financial crisis has made Indians a great deal poorer, the urgent need is to examine why it is that - 70 years after independence - Bharat still remains a Third World nation. The answer boils down to this: petty bureaucrats and gangster politicians have ruined India. They are the reason why this diverse nation of 1.3 billion isn't yet an "Asian tiger". Only if we honestly confront the problems India faces can we devise proper solutions. For sure, India's economy is galloping along at about 6% per year. This is a significant improvement from the so-called "Hindu" rate of 3.5% before 1991. However, there is also much that the growth figures conceal.

Consider, for instance, the fact that no government in India has been able to guarantee a reliable supply of electricity, water or

gas. Roads (including many national highways) are in a pitiful state. Ports constantly experience bottlenecks, and train stations and airports are run-down. Underneath the statistics lies a hot-bed of infrastructure and governance problems. Although economic growth is progressing, it is hardly based on sound foundations.

The train system is a good example. Indian Railways, a government company, owns and operates most of the rail network. Indian Railways holds a virtual monopoly, so there's no incentive for it to improve the quality of its services. Competition is a wonderful thing: it can push businesses to serve the consumer better by lowering prices and improving quality. Yet when government restricts competition, as in the case of India's railways, the result is inefficiency and a lack of concern for what the customer thinks.

The story is much the same across a whole range of industries in India. Whereas developed nations have privatised some of their utilities (for example, electricity) and opened up markets to competition, the governments of India remain wedded to power and refuse to give up control. But instead of everything being owned by the government, it'd make a lot more sense to let the people of India run their own businesses.

The mistake socialists make is to equate ownership by the government with ownership by "the people". That is a fallacy. Government

does not equal "the people"; to the contrary, it is made up of an elite group that often selfishly pursues its own interests. How many times have we heard of politicians lining their Swiss bank accounts with money illegally stolen from taxpayers? This pervasive corruption is an indictment on the theory that politicians care about those they govern - the reality is they couldn't care less.

Private businesses, not governments, are the most direct representation of the community. This is because anyone, including you and me, can set up a business. More importantly, private enterprise is voluntary. No business can force you to buy their products. But government, by stripping away alternatives, can take away your freedom of choice. Therefore, we should be encouraging more private enterprise and less government.

Yours etc., Sukrit Sabhlok New South Wales, Australia

Survey of domestic workers

For the first time in independent India, a survey is being conducted by the Centre on domestic workers. It is estimated that 20 to 80 million people work as domestic workers in India. The survey by the Centre includes all types of services like cooks, drivers, house-keeping, tu-

tors and watchmen. The survey will collect different kinds of information related to domestic work. Domestic workers constitute a significant portion of total employment in informal sector. They are the third largest category of workers after agriculture and construction. Despite the fact that millions of workers are employed in this sector, they do not get the recognition they deserve and there are no laws and policies to deal with the problems faced by these workers. Furthermore, in the wake of Covid -19 outbreak, life became harder for them. Domestic workers, especially maids, are forced to do hard work. They are often poorly paid and fed. Most of them struggle to make both ends meet. They find it hard to manage household expenses with their meagre income. They are not paid for doing overtime work. Their health needs are not met either.

Although the number of domestic workers is very high, the government lacks data on them. The survey will help understand the issues related to them and formulate effective policies. When authentic data is available, it would be easier to protect domestic workers from exploitation.

Yours etc., Venu GS Kollam

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

*"We cannot change anything until we accept it. Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses."*

— Carl Jung

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LXIV No. 107 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2021

**Women and number**

A family health survey done by the Union Government has stated, among other things, that the population of females now outnumbers that of males, in the ratio of 1020:1000. For the first time, women outnumbered men in this country – which had in the past earned notoriety for female infanticide. The likely reversal of the trend augurs well, to the extent that this might signify a change in the attitude of parents to have male children. Such mindsets have also to do with the system of marriages with dowry becoming expensive affairs, though the worry was also of the girl child eventually taking away her share of the family wealth to another family. Wealth is not all that matters in life though it is important for one to have enough to make ends meet. Many affluent families have in recent times been opting to give away most of what they earned to charity – as Warren Buffet, Bill Gates, Narayana Murthy and Asim Premji have done.

Having a fair balance in male-female ratio is important; and it would not matter much if there's a minor tilt either way. That's a likelihood. More important is to ensure that, as we grow up, both men and women have been provided equal opportunities in life. Women here had mostly confined their activities to home-making or working as farm labourers. These are important too, but they can do better. A lesser number of women now laze away time at home; they are earning and becoming equal partners in the maintenance of their homes. They are entering fields that were exclusive preserves of males as in senior positions in the military, flying aircraft, driving buses and autos etc. Yet, their potential is not explored to appreciable levels.

The economic growth of Bangladesh is a case in point. It is performing better than India. A major reason is the concerted efforts being made there to provide job opportunities to women – mainly in the garments sector in a land known for its cotton cultivation. Put together, garment exports became a thriving business there, fetching huge amounts in foreign exchange too. Powering this great change is Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister for repeated terms. In India, free or subsidized ration for more than half the population is the norm if only to make vote banks out of people. This encourages laziness and hurts the nation's productivity. For growth, a nation must make use of its people, both female and male- to the full.

**Present political churning: What will it produce?**

By Patricia Mukhim

That Dr Mukul Sangma, Meghalaya's former Chief Minister and an astute politician had been hobnobbing with the Trinamool Congress in the last few months was no secret but he did spring a surprise by taking along with him twelve MLAs of the Congress thereby leaving the Party which has until then been the main Opposition party, bereft of any clout in the Assembly. The Congress is today reduced to a Party of five legislators. Vincent Pala's arbitrary appointment as the Party chief by the AICC has really done in the Congress. The infamous moniker 'grand old party' seems hell bent on committing political suicide from Punjab to Meghalaya and elsewhere

Garo Hills. These have been the BJP's stronghold and not beyond that. This time for the three bye-elections held, the BJP could only find a candidate for Rajabala. There were no takers for the BJP tickets from Mawryngkneng and Mawphlang both tribal dominated constituencies.

The TMC is emerging as the only party that can give the BJP a run for its money with politicians joining it as a national alternative to the BJP. This implies that hardcore politicians who understand the stakes in politics know that the Congress is no longer the alternative to the BJP. It does not have the

emotional and even their spiritual life. That's the paradox that defeats us repeatedly. Politicians who have joined the TMC expect the electorate to join forces with them although for all of the 12 politicians the stakes are more personal than political. Politics is just a means to attaining power so let us not deceive ourselves that the 12 who joined the TMC are doing it out of a spirit of public service. Each one is working towards enlightened self-interest because they believe (a) that the MDA Government has taken more than its share of political benefits in these last four years and (b) will continue to leverage on the fact that it is in the govern-

ment until 2023 arrives. This is the age of social media and much of this present political churning is being avidly discussed even as many soak in the discourse without views of their own. That's what happens in an election too. Candidates come and bombard the electorate with a laundry list of "what we will do if we win this election." Some of the electorate who are not in the habit of selling their self-respect by taking money believe these glibly made promises. But social media is also awash with conspiracy theories about what will happen if Political Party A or B wins and whether their identities and resources will not both be eroded by the advent of a new Bengal-based political party. It's a paradox but conspiracy theories have also become the most effective community bonding mechanism in the 21st century. Conspiracy theories are very effective emotional tools because they provide agency to those that feel powerless. Then paranoia sets in which also revolves around identity, land, resources and employment. And it is difficult to argue people out of their paranoia.



too where old loyalists have been sidelined and, in some cases shown the door.

The Congress in Meghalaya has been in a state of churn ever since VH Pala's taking over as MPCC Chief. But what does 'churn' really mean? In business churn refers to a scenario where a customer stops buying a product or service and discontinues future payments. Churn is also referred to as an attrition when a customer stops patronizing a company, and the revenue lost from that eroding customer base. That's exactly what has happened to the Congress in Meghalaya. Those leading the Congress party are so unimaginative and stuck in a rut that they believe that people invest in Congress ideology because they have sufficient antipathy against the BJP to stick on to it as an alternative. But the Congress is no longer the only alternative today.

In Meghalaya, it is obvious that Dr Mukul Sangma was not going to play second fiddle to VH Pala. Besides, while the Congress MLAs have only now left their party to join the TMC, the fact is that younger aspiring politicians have already joined the TMC and are readying themselves for the 2023 elections from different constituencies. These young aspirants feel that the BJP is not yet acceptable in Meghalaya. If at all it gets votes then those are only from the largely non-tribal localities like Laban and Pynthor Umkhrah in Khasi Hills and one or two constituencies in

gravitas and the weft that is needed to counter the saffron party. Even its firm loyalists have begun doubting whether the Congress can upstage the BJP in 2024. The Congress party has unfortunately been handcuffed to a slavish deference to the Nehru-Gandhi family. There is no inner-party democracy at the top. That top-down approach has started to stink because people at the Blocks and Primary Units know better who would make a good President at the state level but they are not given the right to elect that leader.

I am no divine crystal gazer but of the five remaining Congress MLAs, one of them if sure to join the NPP. No prizes for guessing who that person is. If the NPP gets all the five it's a bonus but those who jump into the NPP ship will have to deal with anti-incumbency of the MDA Government in 2023 and there are many issues that they will have to explain before the electorate about why they chose to join the NPP.

Those of us in the media of course watch these political goings-on with weary cynicism. In Meghalaya parties hardly make a difference. They are uniforms to be worn before the elections and the manifesto is just a piece of paper. The electorate hardly reads the manifestos and elects people on the basis of (a) their ability to pay money for votes (b) their personal charisma (c) because they belong to the same religion (and let me state this upfront

to create situations to make the states toe the line. That's the sad reality.

As far as Dr Mukul Sangma's choice of the TMC is concerned, he really had no option other than forming his own political party. Aligning with the BJP is not an option because there is place for only one leader in the region. That space has been taken by Himanta Biswa Sarma who is Mukul Sangma's beta-noire. Himanta would make it difficult for Mukul to emerge as a strong national leader to contend with from the region. And Mukul Sangma has the potential to be a national leader. In the TMC he has the leverage to emerge as strong tribal leader from the region at the national level.

There are critics who feel that the TMC is in fact destroying all chances of Opposition unity in the country to take on the BJP, by moving forward alone instead of aligning with the Congress. But when the Congress refuses to sit back and take a hard look at itself and honestly address its organizational problems then few other parties can work with it.

However, the roots of political dysfunction also lie deep in our society and polity. Politics is embedded in the social context. But politicians don't even think it is important to consult their electorate before joining another political party. The electorate is taken for granted and that's because voters do not question the elected. And yet people put politics at the centre of their psychological,

ment until 2023 arrives.

This is the age of social media and much of this present political churning is being avidly discussed even as many soak in the discourse without views of their own. That's what happens in an election too. Candidates come and bombard the electorate with a laundry list of "what we will do if we win this election." Some of the electorate who are not in the habit of selling their self-respect by taking money believe these glibly made promises. But social media is also awash with conspiracy theories about what will happen if Political Party A or B wins and whether their identities and resources will not both be eroded by the advent of a new Bengal-based political party. It's a paradox but conspiracy theories have also become the most effective community bonding mechanism in the 21st century. Conspiracy theories are very effective emotional tools because they provide agency to those that feel powerless. Then paranoia sets in which also revolves around identity, land, resources and employment. And it is difficult to argue people out of their paranoia.

Hence between now and 2023 it will be interesting to watch how the new TMC MLAs are going to explain their actions to the electorate. Sure, they all came together under the leadership of Dr Mukul Sangma but when they go to their electorate it will be a lonely journey. Rebuilding people's trust sometimes takes a generation!

**Militancy woes in Manipur?**

By T S Haokip

*"The recent attack on Assam Rifles is sure to be a game-changer; for the better or worse is where the true challenge lies."*

Churachandpur, a district in Manipur became a central topic of discussion overnight on the 13th November, so much so it was trending on Twitter. The new-found fame however was not something the local people could rejoice for; the trend, unfortunately, relates to the highly condemnable killing of seven people – an Assam Rifles Commanding Officer (CO) along with his wife and son, in addition to 4 jawans. The attack which a valley-based proscribed outfit, the Revolutionary People's Front/People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Manipur Naga People's Front (MNPF) have jointly claimed responsibility for, has drawn flak from all quarters. Taking to Twitter, the Prime Minister has in no uncertain terms expressed his 'condemnation' of the incident and the Home Minister assured that the perpetrators will be brought to justice soon.

Many observed that the attack was meant to attract the attention of the Central Government; to proclaim, "we exist". The attack appears to be carefully planned to make major headlines. Some may ask, "why would

militants under SoO with the Government and it is here that the wisdom of the Government is required to understand that there are forces that want to disturb its initiatives of the peace process in the region.

Militants being killed by security forces or Security forces being killed by militants in Manipur, although rarer in recent times do not come as an absolute surprise to many, considering the engagement of security forces to curb militancy in the region for decades now. The recent attack on Assam Rifles by the militants of Manipur however sent shockwaves across the country; social media went wild, demanding the punishment of those involved in the attack. The uproar is understandable since it involved the death of a woman and child, which makes the militants no better if not worse than 'the forces' they have been accusing of terrorising innocent civilians. For the first time, militants belonging to North East have been referred to by the intellectuals, media personnel, and the Government as terrorists; only the militants are to be blamed for this new development. The press release by the People's Liberation Army, stating that they were not aware of the presence of the CO's family-



a Manipur-based militant outfit hitherto camped in Myanmar feel the need to announce their presence in India now? One among the many reasons could be to send a message before the upcoming Manipur state Assembly election in 2022, where each militant group would want to issue their diktat to political parties and voters. Reports doing the rounds suspect China's involvement in the attack. It is no secret that China has close ties with a few militant groups of the North East and had in the past orchestrated various plans to unleash security instability in the North Eastern Region. Earlier, Indian Intelligence had revealed how there exists an unholy nexus between some militants from Manipur and the Tatmadaw, wherein the militants aided the Burmese military in controlling Burmese civilians desirous of leaving the trouble-torn country. The militants in return are believed to be accorded a base by the Military Junta in Myanmar. The recent attack on Assam Rifles appeared to be carried out by the very militants sheltered by the Tatmadaw. In carrying out a carefully planned attack, one of the worst against security forces in Manipur in recent times, PLA and its cohorts MNPL could be obliging parties that have sheltered them- tragically groups who find pleasure in India's loss.

a woman and a minor, finds few takers. Statements such as, 'the Assam Rifle CO has violated protocols by taking his family along in a military operation,' no matter how true it sounds cannot be a justification for the killing of innocent people.

The security forces will undoubtedly leave no stone unturned to award a befitting reply to the attackers. Here, it is important for the security forces to delicately handle the issue by having the ground knowledge of which group is for and against talks and peace processes initiated by the Government. Militancy issue in the state, post the signing of SoO and ceasefires by the Government with a few militant groups has considerably improved over the years. Uncalculated moves now can cast back Manipur to its darker days of militancy woes, reminiscent of the 1990s and early 2000s.

The fact that the majority of the militant organisations in the state are engaged in talks initiatives of the Government and considering that the recent attacks were carried out by those based in Myanmar, with the possible support of neighbouring countries, the attack on Assam Rifles Convoy cannot be a conclusion for the assumption of total security failure in the state. A relook of the operational tactics and threat assessment, keeping in mind the neighbouring countries' interests to destabilise India, will however have to be effected by the security establishment to ensure that similar incidents are averted in future. As far as punishing the perpetrators is concerned, it is no secret as to where the security forces need to look; the challenge is that they will have to look beyond Churachandpur or for that matter India. The recent attack on Assam Rifles is sure to be a game-changer in terms of security engagement in the North-Eastern region. Apart from shouldering the need to award a befitting response to those in favour of violence over talks, the Government can, for the larger good, use this moment to onboard militant organisations to the talks table.

Letters to the Editor

**NEHU exams a farce**

Editor,  
On behalf of the student community, we seek to express our views on the use of unfair means by students in the online at-home exams conducted by NEHU for undergraduate students. The use of unfair means by students has assumed dangerous proportions. A candidate sitting in his/her home or together with classmates is writing exams. In such a situation, copying in examinations goes on unchecked. It is a system of examination with no invigilators. In fact, these online examinations have become a farce. Examinations have lost their meaning. The purpose of holding an examination is to test the ability of the students. Any system of examinations that does not serve this end is purposeless. To administer an online at-home exam, a number of factors need to be in place to ensure that the exam produces valid, reliable, and fair results.

malpractice. For example, some online exam proctoring software can access the test-takers webcam, microphone, browser activity, and keyboard and mouse to monitor their behaviour during the exam, and any suspicious behaviour is reported to test administrators for review.

If NEHU does not have such a system in place to maintain transparency and fairness in an online at-home exam, we then urge the University authorities to go for the conventional examination system, which is a fair and authentic way of testing.

Getting a degree takes a great deal of time, effort, money and dedication. We pick up skills and knowledge along the way and hope this will help us bag our dream job. But we are in the hands of the incompetent NEHU Examination Department. Students are facing problems in applying for admission to different universities due to delay in procuring their mark sheets and registration cards.

Remote proctoring is also key to monitor test takers' behaviour to prevent

Yours etc.,  
John A Mylliemngap  
Shillong-3

**TMC bombshell!**

Editor,  
The TMC bombshell that struck the landscape of Meghalaya on Thursday with 12 Congress MLAs defecting from the grand old party and entering a relatively new one is expected particularly with the latest political developments soon after the appointment of VH Pala by AICC. Now, out of the 17 Congress MLAs in Meghalaya, 12 led by former CM, Dr. Mukul Sangma have left the party similar to what we see in other states in the country. Till Wednesday, Meghalaya was one of the biggest states with maximum Congress MLAs and it would be really interesting to see what the remaining five do now. Will they go the BJP or NPP way? This defection may well have been engineered by political strategist and tactician, Prashant Kishor, whose recent visit to the town has raised many eyebrows. With this defection, the Congress

ship has sunk in Meghalaya; the region and the country at large. One can even attribute this decimation to the attitude of the AICC and the shrouded trio of Sonia, Rahul and Priyanka.

It is curious though as to why the 12 MLAs have chosen TMC over BJP given the fact that that latter is in power in several states in this region whereas TMC is aspiring only for Tripura - which may well discard it. How far the electorate in Meghalaya will respond to this defection only 2023 will say but this development also gives warning signs to the BJP. The saffron party in the state today is as barren as its President's and a legislator's "top". The latter may even switch sides to NPP if we go by a news report in this daily on Nov 23, 2021, despite the Deputy CM's apparent lack of awareness. Nonetheless, the political spectrum in Meghalaya is set to see numerous hues emerging, leading to the 2023 assembly polls for sure. That the BJP has not been able to cash in from the Congress defection here while a political party eleven hundred kms away in Kolkata led by a mercurial

lady finds favour in this State certainly raises pertinent questions for the BJP think-tank in Meghalaya and New Delhi. The two-man show at the Bivar Road office of the BJP here needs to wake up before it is too late. But then in politics, we can never be too sure of anything. The 12 Congress turncoats can even colour themselves saffron in times to come.

Yours etc.  
BC Paul  
Shillong - 4

**Congress in disarray**

Editor  
The exit of 12 Congress MLAs and their joining the Trinamool Congress is a master stroke and a political craft. The exit of the 12 MLAs from the Congress to the TMC was expected considering the fact that not all was well in the overall functioning of the AICC in appointing various office bearers in crucial positions and the appointment of Mr Pala as MPCC President was done in an undemocratic manner throwing away all the rules of inner-party democracy to the winds. The statement of the MPCC

President and his remarks on the CLP leader in spite of being in the same boat-house was unprecedented as well as surprising. If personal issues takes over professionalism it does not bode well for any organisation.

Another factor is that too much importance was being given to inexperienced people with the notion being floated that anyone who wanted to be part of the current Congress team would have to have money. Money is not everything; it throws all ethics aside. However TMC will surely be the determining party to shape the 2024 elections and Mamata Banerjee's humble background along with her political sagacity as a leader to take everyone along speaks well of her. She is perhaps someone that this nation needs. Hope the winds of change would usher in a better future for the state or else we are damned.

Yours etc...  
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar  
Shilong

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of *The Shillong Times*

*"The battlefield is a scene of constant chaos. The winner will be the one who controls that chaos, both his own and the enemies."*

— Napoleon Bonaparte

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LXIV No.107 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2021

**TMC stuns Congress**

IN walking away with 12 MLAs and joining the Trinamool Congress, Dr Mukul Sangma has shown that he still has command over the majority of MLAs who were elected on a Congress ticket in 2018. He has also shown the Congress High Command that he is no pushover. The Meghalaya Congress President and his cohort may blame Dr Sangma for the great betrayal but they also know that the going is not going to be easy in 2023. While it may be good for the Congress to enrol new members but from what we have seen of the four years of MDA Government, experience means a lot in politics and governance and that lack of experience is seen in the first timer MLAs who have also suddenly been made ministers. As former MLA and minister Paul Lyngdoh articulately pointed out in his interview with this newspaper, some of the ministers in the present government lack depth and have not mastered the rules of executive business thereby leaving it to the Chief Minister to clear files of their respective departments and also to answer queries in the Assembly when searching questions are raised by the Opposition.

Dr Mukul Sangma may have been faulted for not being able to carry his flock along and taking important decisions without consulting cabinet colleagues or at least that was what his former colleagues who left the Congress before the last elections said when they joined the NPP. But Dr Sangma is on firm ground as far as governance is concerned. On his joining the TMC, Dr Sangma while speaking to a national news channel said he had been in conversation with poll strategist Prashant Kishor over several months and is convinced that the TMC has emerged as a strong opposition to the BJP and examples of that are seen in the aggressive manner with which its leader Mamata Banerjee has retained Bengal in the last Assembly elections despite the BJP having unleashed its electoral machine in full force. Dr Sangma alleged that the Congress on the contrary was laid back and unable to counter the BJP offensive. That is what has compelled him to join Mamata Banerjee's party.

Dr Sangma has walked away from the Congress with a bang he has a huge challenge to convince the people of Meghalaya to vote for the TMC. But what may be the saving grace for Sangma is that in Meghalaya political parties and their ideologies don't really matter. People don't vote for lawmakers but for candidates that can address their personal grievances. Such is democracy in Meghalaya.

The NITI Aayog launched on 23 November, the first SDG Urban Index that ranks our cities on the basis of their scores vis-à-vis the Sustainable Development Goals. In all, 56 urban local bodies were ranked on 77 SDG indicators concerned with ending poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education, and gender equality. Of the 56 urban areas ranked in the index, 44 are with a population of above one million. 12 are State capitals with a population of less than a million. The data on these indicators have been sourced from official sources such as data portals of various ministries, and other government agencies.

The cities that have topped the NITI Aayog's (The National Institution for Transforming India Commission) SDGs Urban India Index are Shimla, Coimbatore, Chandigarh, Thiruvananthapuram, and Kochi while Dhanbad, Meerut, Itanagar, Guwahati, and Patna are the worst performers. The Index gives the full list of the cities in terms of their ranking. As per the process followed by the Aayog, "for each SDG, the urban areas are ranked on a scale of 0-100. A score of 100 implies that the urban area has achieved the targets set for 2030; a score of 0 implies that it is the farthest from achieving the targets among the selected urban areas.

The areas with a ranking between 0 and 49 have been ranked as aspirants, those with 50-64 are termed as performers, 65-99 are called front-runners and the ones with perfect scores are called achievers. Notably, not a single area has a perfect score.

The Index and the Dashboard attached to it are expected to localise the ownership and implementation of the SDGs, especially their monitoring at the country and local level. The Index also exposes the gaps in data and reporting system etc. It will also create an ecosystem in which all stakeholders will be equipped to take data-based decisions. This transformative approach is essential as our cities are becoming critical as engines of growth and development of our country.

The above perspective was reflected in the statement issued by NITI Aayog on the launch of the Index, "In its journey towards localising the SDGs and instituting robust SDG progress monitoring systems at the national, State/UT, and local levels, NITI Aayog has developed the SDG Urban Index & Dashboard (2021-22). The index and dashboard will strengthen SDG localisation and institute robust SDG monitoring at the city level."

The index was developed in collaboration between the NITI Aayog and GIZ and BMZ, both development agencies of Germany under the ongoing partnership between the two countries

**NITI Aayog & SDGs**

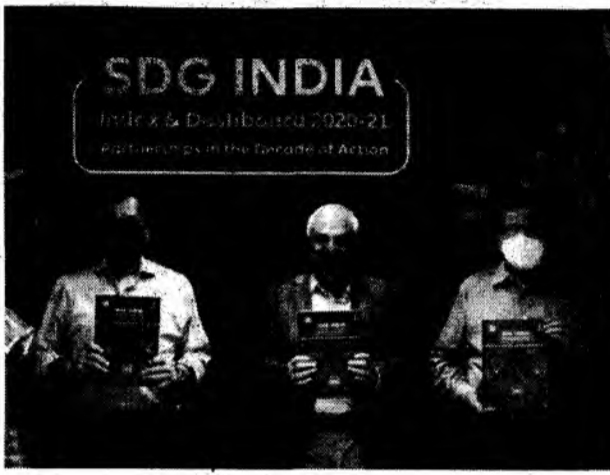
**A fresh initiative**

By Dr D. K. Giri

called the Indo-German Development Cooperation. He calls our planet Mother Earth. He added, "As our ancient

*"The cities that have topped the NITI Aayog's (The National Institution for Transforming India Commission) SDGs Urban India Index are Shimla, Coimbatore, Chandigarh, Thiruvananthapuram, and Kochi while Dhanbad, Meerut, Itanagar, Guwahati, and Patna are the worst performers. The Index gives the full list of the cities in terms of their ranking."*

On the Partnership on SDGs, Prof. Dr. Claudia Warning, BMZ Director text says- Keep pure! For Earth is our mother! And we are her children!"



General said that it will, "focus on deepening SDG localisation and monitoring, and addressing critical gaps in institutional capacity and data systems on SDGs at national and State levels. We look forward to strengthening this partnership with NITI Aayog in building capacities on SDGs."

The SDGs were adopted in the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly held on 25th September 2015. The resolution was

Modi urged the world leaders to embrace a change in our lifestyle that would make us less dependent on energy and more sustainable in our consumption. He called for launching of a global education programme that prepares our next generation to protect and conserve nature. He underlined the importance of partnership, the core strategy in achieving the SDGs. Ending the speech, he said, "So, we must transform international partnerships

*"The Index and the Dashboard attached to it are expected to localise the ownership and implementation of the SDGs, especially their monitoring at the country and local level. The Index also exposes the gaps in data and reporting system etc. It will also create an ecosystem in which all stakeholders will be equipped to take data-based decisions."*

called, "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". It consisted of 17 SDGs and associated 169 targets. The SDGs aim to secure peace and prosperity for the entire world, for the people and the planet, now and in future.

Speaking on the occasion, on the adoption of the document by the UN General Assembly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said, "Today, much of India's development agenda is mirrored in the Sustainable Development Goals. We represent a culture that

on the strength of solidarity with fellow human beings and also our enlightened self-interest". A word on the concept and approach to Sustainable development is in order as often it's confused in its definition and is loosely used for many other forms of growth and development. A working definition of this popular term is "the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In order to secure Sustainable Development, it

is essential to harmonise three core elements of governance and development-economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. The 17 SDGs seeking to transform the world require adoption of key approaches; to popularise these, to spur action, to leverage and scale up partnership.

On the progress of realising the SDGs, according to the 3rd edition of SDG Index released on 3 June 2021, India has made steady progress in areas of health, energy, and infrastructure. India has taken strides in social, economic, and environmental development over the past year. Since 2019, India's overall score across SDGs has gone up from 60 to 66 in 2021 due to nation-wide improvement in 'clean water and sanitation' and 'affordable and clean energy' respectively.

In contrast to the official release of figures and claims made by the GOI body like NITI Aayog, the non-governmental agencies have a different story to tell. The State of India's Environment Report 2021 revealed that India's rank was 115 last year and dropped by two places primarily because major challenges like ending hunger and achieving food security (SDG 2), achieving gender equality (SDG 5) and building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and fostering innovation (SDG 9) remain in the country.

And worse, India ranks below four South Asian countries -- Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. India ranked 168 out of 180 countries in terms of Environmental Performance Index (EPI) which is calculated on various indicators, including environmental health, climate, air pollution, sanitation and drinking water, ecosystem services, biodiversity, etc. Again, India's rank was 172 in the environmental health category, which is an indicator of how well countries are protecting their populations from environmental health risks.

To quote another report, The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2020 by Yale University, India ranked 148, exactly 21 positions behind Pakistan which was at 127th position in the category of biodiversity and habitat which assesses countries' actions toward retaining natural ecosystems and protecting the full range of biodiversity within their borders. Mark Twain in his autobiography wrote, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics." This phrase is used by many to bolster their arguments or berate an opponent. Looking at the reports we feel as if this famous phrase is validated. However, it is certainly clear that India is making some progress, but "has miles to go before we sleep" in peace and security. --INFA

(The writer is Prof. International Politics JIMMC)

**Of drones, unemployment and social exclusion**

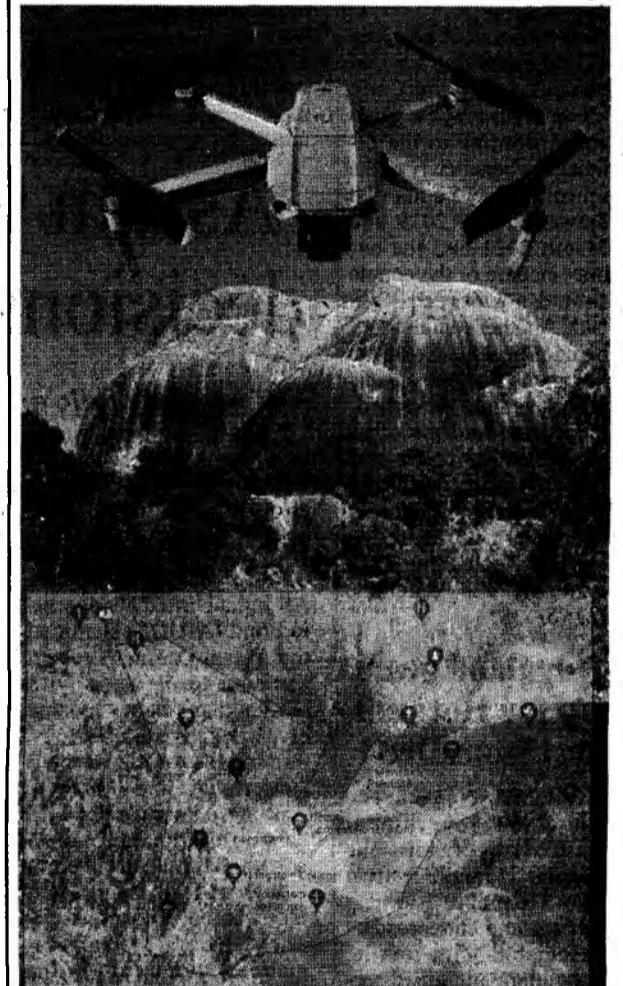
By Veronica Pala

There has been a falling share of labour in the national income of most countries of the world. This is because a large number of jobs have vanished into thin air. They are taken over by machines and Artificial Intelligence (AI). ATMs and CDMs have replaced the cashiers in the banks; chatbots and virtual assistants are used to help process applications to higher educational institutions, robochefs are replacing cooks and chefs in restaurants, to name just a few.

The pace at which technology is developing and changing our lifestyles is frightening. No corner of the earth, however remote, can escape the touch of AI. Now in Meghalaya medicines will be delivered by drones in West Khasi Hills district to start with. Should we welcome this development? What next? Very soon when big e-commerce companies set up their godowns in Meghalaya they will compete with each other in being the best and the fastest. Drones will inevitably be

good for the people. Coming back to the example of drones delivering medicines, the same service can be done with human labour, thereby, providing employment. We need to introspect what hinders the delivery of health care services and medicines in the rural areas of Meghalaya. Is it bad roads? Does lack of basic amenities act as a disincentive for doctors to work in the rural areas? Is it lack of monitoring and supervision? The solution to the problem does not lie in AI. It lies in better rural infrastructure and a citizenry that is aware of their rights and is willing to question the authorities and elected representatives when their rights are denied.

The scope of employment for the urban educated youth too is very limited in Meghalaya. What work will they do? Where are the jobs? How much are they earning on an average? What are the new jobs that are being created and what are the jobs that are being lost? Are our youth ready for the new



used to deliver packages at the doorsteps of consumers. Further, driverless cars will be a common sight. Washing machines and dishwashers are already replacing human labour to a large extent. The pandemic has quickened the process of digitalization. Online learning has reduced the role of teachers and so there will be less demand for teachers especially at higher levels. Students can enroll themselves in courses being offered in any part of India and the credits that they earn in such courses will be included in their result leading to the award of the degree for which they have registered in the parent institution.

This is the essence of massive open online courses (MOOCs). The list is endless if we are to enumerate the jobs that will be lost and have been lost in this era of fourth industrial revolution.

Although there will be immense gains in productivity and efficiency, there will be catastrophic disruptions of the labour markets. This will be more so in developing countries or educationally backward states like Meghalaya where only 28 percent of rural Class VIII children can do division and 50 percent of Class V students cannot even read a Class II level text according to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER). The people of the state are not ready for AI when majority of the students still struggle with the basic 3 R's. This is not being anti-development. But we need to decide what kind of development will be

jobs? Are we providing them education, training and skills to be future-ready? These are questions that need to be asked by the policy makers.

Inequalities are increasing and social exclusion is observed in many aspects. The excluded are those who do not enjoy the fruits of development. There are many forms of social exclusion and unemployment is one of them. The unemployed are excluded from the production process. They do not contribute to the production of goods and services. Hence they are also excluded from the consumption process. They have no income to consume the myriads of goods and services that the economy produces. Thus although the economy becomes more efficient and productive with less labour and more AI, the aggregate demand for those goods and services will decline because the masses have no purchasing power. Economic growth will decline leading to more unemployment.

The social ramifications of large-scale unemployment are serious. Therefore, the state and the country as a whole need to adopt policies that benefit not only the capital-owning class but also the labour class. This may slow down the process of development, but a development that will lead to exclusion of a large section of the populace should not be considered as a development at all.

(The writer teaches in Department of Economics NEHU, Shillong)

Letters to the Editor

**Shillong's Pink Festival**

Editor, The Cherry Blossom Festival has brought back some cheer in the city. The Ward's Lake adorns a pink look with pink balloons, pink umbrellas, ribbons et al. What is also very striking is that there are serious attempts to keep the Lake ecologically sound by frisking people at the entrance. Visitors are told to deposit cigarettes, plastic water bottles at a certain counter and to take them back with them on exiting the venue. This is most encouraging and a very ecologically sound practice. The Lake looked spick and span and had volunteers everywhere that kept a strict eye on litterers. The Literary Fest was

of a very high quality with intellectuals engaging with on various topics such as green tourism, heritage conservation when words grow wings. The Lake was awash with local visitors and tourists who enjoyed the ambience. Several stalls around the Lake had lovely exhibits. Of particular interest to me are the lovely carved wood items. They were expensive but looking at the time and effort taken to sculpt the wood they are worth their price.

What was a little disappointing was the colour of the water in the Lake. It looked positively polluted. It is not known how water enters the Lake. Some people informed me that waste water from the Printing and Stationery Department, Government of Meghalaya flows into the Ward's Lake. If that's

the case then the Government should try and clean up the Lake and prevent polluted water from flowing in. I recall when we visited the Lake as children, we would see fish swimming in the waters. Now we cannot even see a single fish. I suppose the lake waters will no longer support marine life. That's one negative point to an otherwise lovely, pink festival.

Covid had dampened our spirits but now that the pandemic has slowed down and things have almost returned to normal it was so good to see young people thronging the Lake taking pictures and just enjoying the Festival. The checking at the gate was tight. Only those who are doubly vaccinated were allowed in. Tourists have started pouring into Shillong. My only hope is that Covid has left these hills and we

can go back to our normal lives.

Yours etc., Banrap Lyngdoh, Via email

**Calm before the storm**

Editor With the new COVID variant detected in South Africa, European nations have started to bring international travel restrictions and stock markets have indicated weak vital signs. World Health Organisation Chief Scientist Dr Soumya Swaminathan while speaking to Times Now emphasised on the need to strengthen public health measures and using science based approach to tackle the new variant. Certainly the majority of countries have opened up seeking normalcy,

the dominant 'Delta' strain which wreaked havoc across the world and not to forget India was in the midst of the storm six months ago. Strong vaccination drive including the mandate for masking did bring down the numbers but complacency is the last thing we need.

Recently concluded elections in Meghalaya saw COVID protocols fly out of the window and the leaders themselves not practicing what they preach. Directives circulated on social media came heavily on ordinary mortals while the political class was immune from both virus and laws.

Mature leadership is required to contain the virus which still has legs to travel. A multi-pronged approach is needed using the help of the scientific community, researchers, epidemiolo-

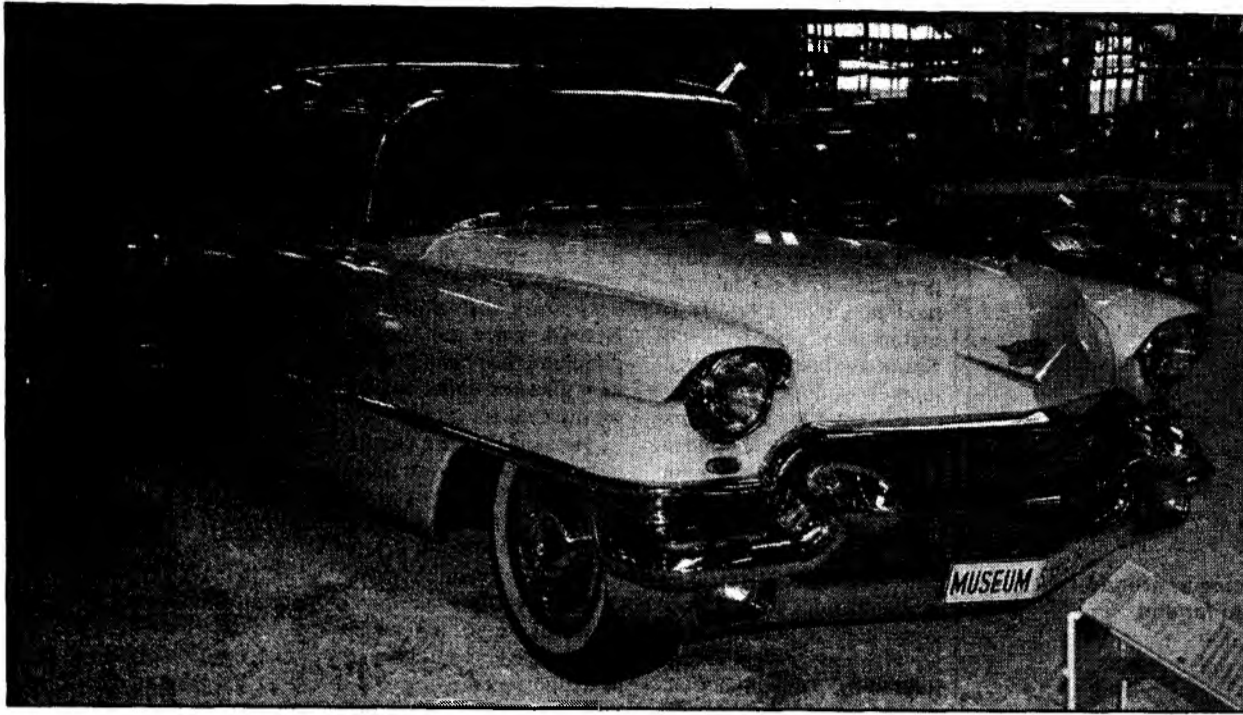
gists and media specialists in order to be one step ahead in the game. While there is no need to press the panic button but sitrep (situation report) on evidence, local data, surveillance and testing should follow suit.

"Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it," said George Santayana. The former Delta Force commander Pete Blaber in his book 'The Mission, The Men and Me' pressed the need to recognise life's underlying patterns in order to emerge wiser and be prepared for when the smoke clears.

Yours etc., Christopher Gatpoh, Via email

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of The Shillong Times

# The Man And His Machine



India's first specialist automobile and automotive fine arts auction house, Historic Auctions Private Ltd., founded by renowned collectors, connoisseurs and automotive historians of international repute, is hosting a preview for their inaugural auction of Collectible Automobiles and Automotive Art, at the Museo Camera, Gurugram.

There will be a display of 9 out of the 20 select, collectible cars from the auction. Cars at the preview include:-

\* A 1959 Cadillac Sedan de Ville in "Cadillac Pink" -- made famous by Hollywood. This car is recognisable for its distinctive, tall tailfins with dual bullet tail-lights.

\* A 1958 MG A-1500 sports car from the era when aerodynamics started playing an important role and is the first production streamlined body from the MG stables.

\* A rare, 1958 Toyota FJ40 Land Cruiser, which is the vehicle that lay the founding stone for the current Land Cruiser -- a Japanese Icon.

\* A Fiat 500C "Topolino"; Topolino translates from Italian literally as "little mouse", and came to be affectionately known as 'Mickey Mouse'.

\* A single owner, original 1982 Mercedes-Benz 200 will also be on display, which will be auctioned in aid of the CKS Foundation. Known as the W123, one of the most successful Mercedes ever, selling 2.7 million units.

\* A preservation class, 1934 Cadillac 355 -- D'7 Passenger Imperial Sedan. It is a rarity to be able to own a preservation class car that is unrestored, untouched, and unaltered since it was manufactured.

\* An extremely original, 1958 Mercedes Benz 180 Ponton in an unrestored, "Barn Find" condition waiting to come back to life for the new owner.

\* A 1924 Austin 7, famously known as the "Baby Austin", it was for its time one of the smallest and most economical cars available, making it extremely popular.

\* A 1948 Chrysler Windsor, a luxury sedan from the Chrysler Corporation, one of the "Big Three" automobile manufacturers from the US.

The preview will also celebrate Swarnim Vijay Varsh, commemorating 50 years of India's victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war by taking up a charitable cause. An ex-Indian army Mahindra Jeep CJ-3B unrestored project will be auctioned, with the entire proceeds

donated to an Army Veterans welfare group.

Paintings by renowned filmmaker and artist, Raja Muzzafar Ali's signature style of ethereal abstractions, celebrates the beauty of classic cars like the Delage, Delahaye, Bentley, Duesenberg, the Isotta Fraschini, and Rolls Royce among others. "For me and many others like me, a car is a toy. Every time I see a car, a certain playfulness awakens within me. The Automobile is the greatest cult the human race has discovered for itself, both in war and peace" commented the artist. Proceeds from the sale of the paintings are pledged to the Kotwara Welfare Trust.

Attended by collectors, members of erstwhile royal families and connoisseurs of art, the preview will be the first in a series of events planned by Historic Auctions, both online and offline that will celebrate collectible cars and the cultural ecosystem that thrives around them.

"Events like Pebble Beach that promote historic Indian cars in the global arena and world-class events like the Cartier Travel with Style Concours and the 21 Gun Salute that take place in India, raise awareness concerning classic cars, and the joy and prestige associated with the hobby. Historic Auctions was born out of the need of the enthusiast, for a reliable and transparent platform to indulge their passion," shares HH Rana Manvendra Singh Barwani, Chairman, Historic Auctions.

With 150 years of collective experience, Historic Auctions will host online and live auctions, private sales, curate collections and provide vehicle appraisals, and will in due course also launch an exclusive online store, with special products for automobile and motorcycle enthusiasts. Historic Auctions will provide an organised and transparent experience for new and existing automotive enthusiasts.

The event begins with a VIP preview with HH Maharaja Gaj Singhji II of Marwar-Jodhpur as the Chief Guest along with other eminent personalities who will grace the occasion. (IANSlife)

## Clean, conscious and vegan: The new standards for beauty

By Plabita Sharma

The World Vegan month of November usually brings with itself an increased amount of dialogue and searches about Vegan lifestyle, sustainable living and clean beauty. Before pondering any further, it is important to understand what the Vegan lifestyle is and how it goes beyond the concept of consuming a plant-based diet.

Veganism essentially is a lifestyle that is driven by compassionate choices and an increased awareness of one's actions on the world. Thus motivated by the two, a vegan individual usually carefully curates their day-to-day practices in a manner that does little to no harm to the planet, the people and all of its inhabitants.

Beauty as industry has time and again been scrutinised for its effects on the consumers and the ecosystem - this can be during the manufacturing process or the effect it has on the consumer's thought processes. Now, as the world moves towards adopting Global Sustainability Goals, committing to a world that works with the natural resources instead of against them - it is only fair for each individual to be curious about making the right choices to make their beauty bag as consciously curated as possible. With multiple brands coming up with new standards of vegan and sustainable beauty, many consumers are left confused and doubting the authenticity of these claims. So here is a quick guide that can help you make the right choices:

### Vegan and cruelty free labels

Keeping true to the traditional meaning of Vegan - any vegan beauty product means that it is completely plant based and has no animal ingredients or any of their by-products like honey, beeswax, dairy product etc. Similarly, cruelty-free as a label means that the ingredients or the final product did not test on animals or harm any animals during the production process. One way to test the authenticity is to check if these products are legally certified by PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), or

verified by Vegan organisations, as The Vegan Society and others. Cruelty-free and vegan products are also generally categorized by having cleaner and gentler formulas as they are mostly deprived of harsh chemicals and solvents.

### Ethical and natural ingredients

It is equally important to invest in products that use ethically sourced and sustainably harvested ingredients. Since most vegan products tend to be plant derived it is of utmost value to ensure that while the source is nature, the impact of manufacturing is also minimal so that there is no harm done to the environment. Often the face scrubs used by us are most damaging not just to the face and to the marine life as well; thus opting for more natural ingredients rather than synthetic ones is quite beneficial. Some natural scrubbing ingredients are sugar, salt, coffee which are safe for the coral reefs and far gentler than synthetic scrubs.

### Sustainable and ecofriendly packaging

While the ingredients and formulation can be certified, it is also important to pay attention the quality, material and nature of the packaging in which the product is being stored. With an increase in clean-beauty standards, the consumption of such products has also increased, thus giving brands the opportunity to further develop their packaging in a manner that is sustainable and its increased quantity does not harm the environment.

The above is a small snippet in a long list of things that can help contribute to a cleaner and more consciously lifestyle. Where demand increase, supply follows - as people begin to demand ethical, responsible production and products, more and more brands have begun to deliver. Household names such as The Body Shop have pioneered conversations on clean, green and sustainable beauty for decades - thus making them a frontrunner for several old time vegan people.

(The author is National Training Manager, The Body Shop India)

## Freddie's music is still the soundtrack of our lives

Freddie Mercury (born Farrokh Bulsara in 1946) died on this day 30 years ago. A prolific songwriter, arranger and music producer, a consummate theatrical entertainer and one of the 20th century's best-known lead singers, Mercury fronted Queen from 1970 until his death in 1991.

Artistically, he challenged many of the prevailing pop and rock parameters, willing to take musical risks and happy not to be part of the mainstream. He fearlessly pushed artistic boundaries, believing in the spontaneity of live performance: every show was different.

### THE COMPOSER

As a composer, Mercury drew on an eclectic range of genres. He wrote songs with poetic and heartfelt lyrics, witty metaphors and memorable melodies, with Queen drawing influences from The Everly Brothers, the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd and the Beach Boys.

Mercury's 1979 composition Crazy Little Thing Called Love pays homage to Elvis Presley. In the song, Mercury subtly models aspects of Presley's vocal tone and rockabilly styling in the catchy chorus.

He gives us just a hint of his vocal range in the bridge, on the lyrics "she gives me hot and cold fever" where Mercury effortlessly uses an octave yodel.

In 1975's Bohemian Rhapsody, perhaps Queen's most famous song, Mercury took genre crossing to a new level. This six-minute epic is unrivalled in complexity of form, lavish production, vocal layering and the sheer number of choral overdubs.

The song, which topped the British charts for almost nine weeks, was described by Mercury as a "mock opera".

### THE SINGER

Technically masterful, Mercury possessed a voice that was powerful, agile, and highly expressive. A lyric rock tenor with over three octaves in range, Mercury could belt into his upper register with his signature fast vibrato, or use a controlled pure falsetto with smooth legato phrasing.

Strong musicianship, excellent pitch and vocal control enabled Mercury to draw on a broad array of note choices, dynamics, tone colours and vocal effects. His vocal timbre could depict a delicate vulnerability, especially with his falsetto, or use dynamic extremes to accentuate lyrics with screams and growls.

Mercury demonstrated his versatility, genre crossing and creative exploration on the 1985 song Living On My Own.

Here, he employs scat singing and the opening syncopated repetition of a single note hints at Ella

Fitzgerald's influence. It is a driving, high spirited and fearless vocal solo. Mercury solos again at the end of the song with a loose vocal reference to Duke Ellington's It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing).

### THE PERFORMER

Queen's appearance at the historic Live Aid Concert at London's Wembley Stadium in July 1985 remains one of the greatest rock performances of all time.

Mercury and band were in stellar form, having just completed a world tour for their album The Works, recorded in 1984. When the entire crowd of 72,000 joins Mercury in beating out the rhythm to We Will Rock You, it is electrifying.

Further evidence of Mercury's masterful stagecraft can be found in a bootleg video of Queen performing in Sydney in 1985.

Twelve minutes into the footage, Mercury slowly struts to the piano and improvises a segue into Somebody to Love in a gospel style with a call and response with the audience.

His years of touring experience provided him with an arsenal of stagecraft prowess: strutting, holding poses, dressed in his glam rock style, with white spandex.

Audiences adored his showmanship and flamboyance.

### THE INFLUENCER

30 years on from his death, Mercury's incredible compositions are still part of the soundtrack of our lives.

Somebody To Love was used in the films Happy Feet (2006) and Ella Enchanted (2004). Lady Gaga coopted her name from Queen's Radio GaGa.

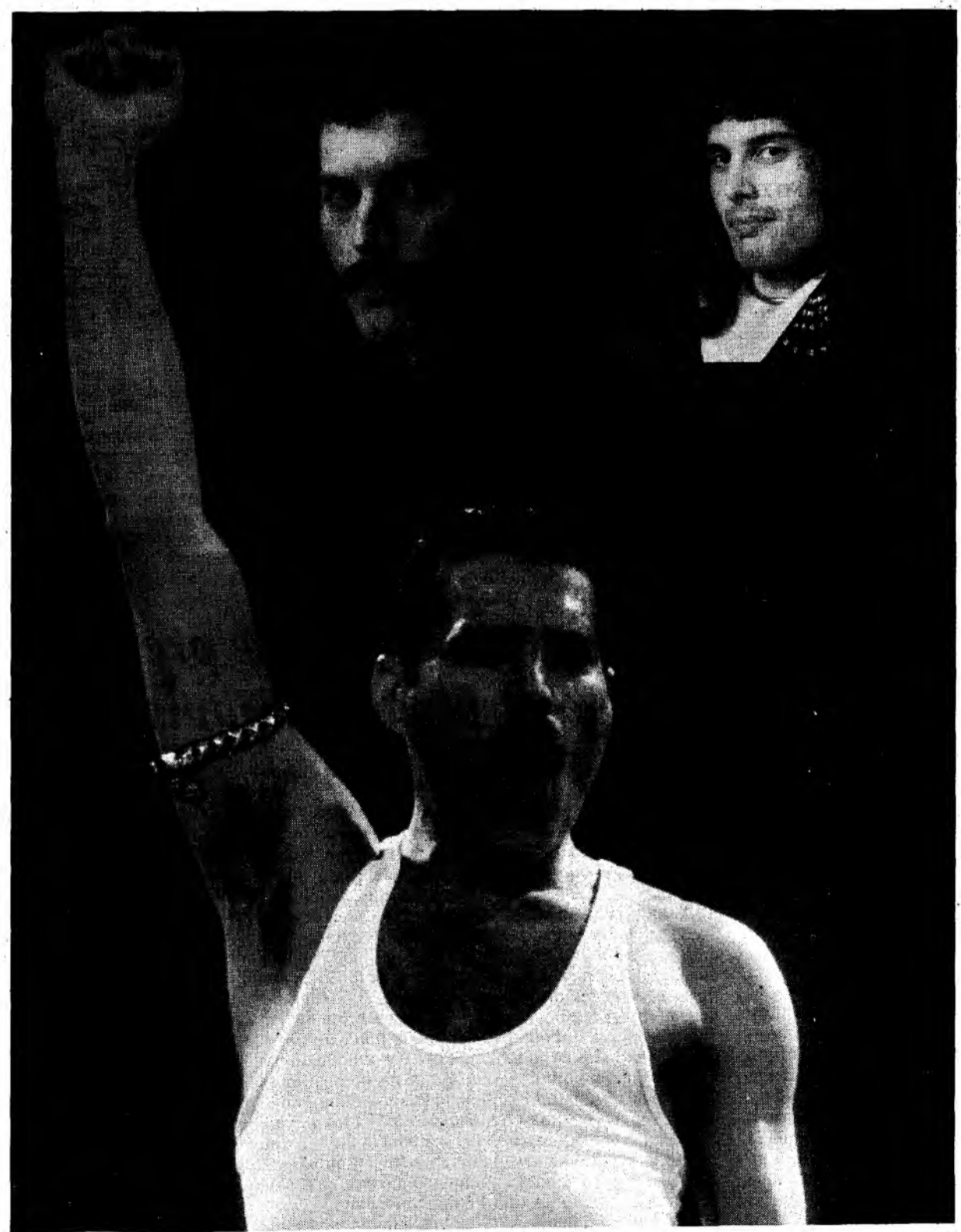
Ceelo Green attributes his falsetto usage to his collection of Queen albums.

Kurt Cobain listened to Queen's News of the World on 8-track.

Katy Perry has acknowledged Mercury as a major influence, performing Queen's Don't Stop Me Now during her Hello Katy tour in 2009. P!nk included the iconic stadium songs We Are the Champions in her tour in 2019.

Many filmmakers have told his story: Bryan Singer's film Bohemian Rhapsody (2018) is joined by a suite of documentaries. Next month, the BBC are releasing a new documentary, this time looking at his tragic death from AIDS at just 45.

30 years on, Mercury is remembered as a powerful songwriter, filled with on-stage magnetism, creativity and intelligence, a hard work ethic and a passion for perfection. (The Conversation)



# Talking turkey!

## How the Thanksgiving bird got its name

**M**eleagris Gallopavo Day is a bit of a mouthful. Which may be why this Thanksgiving, most people will opt for the less ornithologically precise "Turkey Day."

And just as turkey is a versatile meat – think of those leftover options! – so too is the word "turkey," which can refer to everything from the bird itself to a populous Eurasian country to movie flops.

As a scholar who studies word origins, I love "talking turkey" – not only how the bird came to be named, but also how the word has evolved over time. But let's start with what has become the centerpiece of most Thanksgiving Day dinners.

The North American turkey – the kind that many families will be carving up this Thanksgiving – was being domesticated in Mexico some 2,000 years ago.

Europeans glimpsed their first turkeys around 1500, when Spanish explorers arrived in the Americas and brought them back to the mother country. By the 1520s, turkeys were being bred in Spain, and soon the delicacy was appearing on rich people's tables across Europe.

But what to call the new import? Europeans in the New World were overwhelmed by the new plants and animals they saw, and often used familiar names for unfamiliar species. The Spanish, for instance, thought turkeys looked like peacocks, so they used the Spanish word "pavos." The French called them "poules d'Indes," or Indian chickens, later shortened to "dinde."

To the English, the newly discovered American birds looked like the guineafowl – a bird native to Africa but which was introduced into Europe by Arab and Turkish traders in the 14th and 15th centuries.

And it is this point in the story



that the modern-day turkey gets its name.

The Ottoman Empire was then at its height. Ethnic Turks, based in Constantinople (now Istanbul), ran the empire that spanned the Near East, Middle East and North Africa. As a result, to many Europeans, anyone from "the East" was a "Turk."

Because Ottomans dominated trade in the eastern Mediterranean, a lot of produce coming to Europe was seen as "Turkish." So a precious stone from Persia was named "Turkish stone," and the French version of that name, "pierre turquoise," gave us the word "turquoise."

In the same way, African guineafowl, introduced by Turkish traders, became a "turkey-cock" or "turkey-hen." Over time, this was shortened to just "turkey."

Now that's a feast!

For as long as the New World turkeys have been in Europe, they've been featured in celebratory meals. The English word first appears in print in an account of a banquet hosted by politician John Prideaux in 1555: The menu included 38 red deer, 43 pheasants, 50 quince pies, 63 swans, 114 pigeons, 120 rabbits, 840 larks, 325 gallons of Bordeaux wine and "Turkies 2, rated at 4s. a piece."

History's most famous turkey dinner, though, was served in Plymouth Plantation in 1621, as 50 Pilgrims who survived a year of brutal hardship joined 90 Native Americans for a three-day feast. Turkey wasn't the only dish being served. Writing in his History of Plymouth Plantation, Governor William Bradford noted that Native Americans brought "codd, & bass,

& other fish," and others brought "water foule" and venison. But he was especially impressed with the "great store of wild Turkies."

The bird has become so associated with harvest-time celebratory dinners that we've been calling Thanksgiving "Turkey Day" since at least 1870.

Meanwhile, the word has continued to find new uses, showing up with dozens of meanings. In 1839, the Southern Literary Messenger – a magazine edited by Edgar Allan Poe – reported on a new kind of dance, called the "turkey-trot" from its jerking motions.

In 1920, New York's Department of Health reported that "Some addicts voluntarily stop taking opiates and 'suffer it out' ... which in their slang is called taking 'cold turkey.'"



The turkey's reputation for stupidity prompted other meanings. The legendary gossip columnist Walter Winchell told readers of Vanity Fair in 1927 about some new showbiz slang: "A turkey," he reported, "is a third rate production." Since then, movies that flop with the critics or at the box office have been called turkeys.

Another disparaging sense arrived in the 1950s, when turkey became a name for "a stupid, slow, inept, or otherwise worthless person." That, in turn, probably led to the rise of the "jive turkey," which first showed up in African American speech in the early 1970s, defined by slang lexicographer Jonathon Green as "an insincere, deceitful, dishonest person."

And what about "talk turkey"? Well, that can mean quite contradictory things.

One dictionary from 1859 defines it as "To talk in a silly manner, talk nonsense." A similar meaning is attached to another turkey-related word, "gobbledygook."

Another definition found in the 1889 "Americanisms, Old & New" had "talking turkey" meaning "To use high-sounding words, when plain English would do equally well

or better."

The most familiar meaning of "talking turkey," in which it is a stand-in for "straight talk," is often said to come from a once popular joke. A white man and an American Indian, the story goes, spend a day hunting together and manage to bag a turkey and a somewhat less bountiful buzzard. The devious white man proposes a "heads-I-win-tails-you-lose" division of the spoils. "I'll take the turkey, and you the buzzard," he says, "or, if you prefer, you take the buzzard, and I'll take the turkey." The frustrated American Indian replies – usually in some version of would-be comic pidgin English – "You talk all buzzard to me, and don't talk turkey."

Those who study word histories are skeptical of stories like this, since most are invented after the fact. More likely, "talk turkey" came from pleasant conversation at Thanksgiving dinner, or maybe negotiations between Native Americans and European colonists over the cost of poultry. Whatever the origin, though, when we "talk turkey," we're engaging in the kind of straightforward, honest speech the scheming hunter denied his hunting partner. (*The Conversation*)

### 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, NOV 28, 2021

Moon trine Uranus on your solar return chart and will give exceptional results for the whole year. The time is favorable for you. There will be good news related to your new job or promotion which will lift the spirits of your family. You will be able to establish yourself in office with your hard work. Everyone will take advice from you. Even your colleagues will be fond of you. You will have monetary gains. Your business too will flourish and prosper. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will fall in love with a person known to you and will also plan to get married. The family will receive some good news. You will be talked off highly because of your noble deeds. Your name and fame will also rise. You will have a feeling of dedication. There will be peaceful atmosphere and calmness at home. There will be struggle in your life, but later on you will get success.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



Time is extremely favorable. You will have financial gains. A problem which was bothering you for a long time will get solved. You will also excel at your workplace. Your bosses will have a good impression about you. Your disputes with brothers will get resolved. The placement of Jupiter will give you benefits. You will also spend quality time with your family members. And will undertake a program to move out from home. Your advice will be important in the family. You will receive the blessings of your elders. Your love life will be amazing. It will be a time for mental peace. Property disputes will be resolved with talks. You will have a positive attitude towards life.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



Your income will increase. Students will focus on their studies. In competitive exams, hard work may be required to achieve favorable results. In the interview also extra preparation is required. Your ideas will be revolutionary and you will be liked by one and all. Your bosses will also have a good opinion about you. You will get success in whatever you do. Your business problems will get solved. You will gain a lot from good and nice people. Your personality will attract people towards you. A person working in your office will show interest in you. And will have liking too. The plan for journey outside the country can be made. You will have opportunities for advancement. You will plan for your future. The journey to a religious place is expected.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



It is time for gains in business and job. Your work will get completed. You will have financial gains. Your name and fame will spread far and wide. Your importance too will increase in work. You will do your work with concentration. You will get result of your hard work done earlier. As the business situation is good, your sales will increase. You will have profits and gains. It is a good time for students. They will get success in exams. There can be a plan for unmarried people to engage in the house. There is possibility of good work. It is a favorable time to start a new project. You will also go out with your family for lunch or dinner. You will enjoy a wide range of cuisine.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



It is time for a change which you were thinking for a long time. You will do your work with full dedication and will remain in a wonderful position. Your enemies will be unable to harm you. You will make new investments. You will have gains. There will be a change in your lifestyle and routine for the better. You will gain success in income and profit matters which will increase your morale. There will be a sense of security. You will have reasonable employment opportunities. The mind will be drawn towards fulfilling ambition. It will be a pleasant week for the marital life. Work will be done as per your will. You will fulfill all the responsibility of the family very well.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



The results that you will get this week will please you a lot. You will be dedicated in your work. You will also be able to complete the task on time. A property dispute will get resolved with help of a third person in mediation. In the job or business you will achieve your goals. The excess of hard work will keep you busy and exhausted. You will be happy with your bosses. Your relations with spouse too will remain balanced. You will have lot of joy and cheer in family ties. You will also be able to keep your mind under control. You will also keep all your important files properly and start a new systematic routine. You will get a promotion in job. Students will do well in exams. Overall, you will enjoy a peaceful atmosphere.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



Your work will show signs of growth. It will be a great time. Whatever work you want to do it will get completed with ease. Meeting with people, enhancing social activities will give you success. Your professional circle will also get widened. Your income will increase. Welfare work will appeal a lot to you. You will also move forward in the matters of money and finance. You will also come to understand the

importance of your loved ones in life. Your spouse will be a source of inspiration. You will also avoid argument with someone close. You will get victory in debates. You will show lot of patience. Your time will be spent in productive tasks. Time is good. You will be praised by one and all.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)



It is a favorable week. Some works that has been struck for a long time and giving you stress will now finish without any hitch. The successful vibrations will resonate with you. You will sort out all difficult problems. You will also take part in seminars and conferences. Your perspective towards life will become more positive. You will move with the time. You will share good understanding and bonding with your spouse. You will also prove yourself as a true friend. You will help your family members. There will be increase in love between brothers and sisters. You will be gentle towards your colleagues. You will have lots of profits in business. Your mood will be good because of which you will excel in your work. A good news which will gladden your heart will come from somewhere.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



Time will have a positive effect on you. You will become active and will be full of zest and zeal. Your doubts in your mind will get cleared. You will face no difficulties. You will also get all the credit for your hard work. You can also change your job for your betterment. You will receive a feedback from your colleagues. Destiny will support you a lot. You will share amazing bonding with your spouse/partner. And will also spend lot of time enjoying each other's company. Your time will be spent trying to keep yourself fit and healthy and thus you will concentrate on yoga, exercises etc. You will also join a gym. To meet your extra expenses you will do extra work. Success is assured.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)



It will be a money receiving week. You will get success in your job/work/business. You will also plan about future investments. You will get success in tasks like your children's marriage, career or studies. You will also have financial gains. Your meetings with an important person will be fruitful. You will have a say in official matters. You will also come closer to your partner. You will finally take a breath of relief. You will thank your good times and luck. You will have faith in God. You will carry out your responsibilities well. You will also get success in court related matters. Those who are job less will get a good job.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



Yourself respect and dignity will increase. Your colleagues will perform every task in office after taking your advice and consultation. People will value your ideas. You will get lot of importance from your bosses too. There will be stability in your career. Your efforts for acquiring money will be successful. The time will be success achieving. Your government related matters will gain momentum. You will also get your pension in time. You will be victorious in court cases. Your self confidence will be high. You may receive the awards in the form of monetary benefits or gifts. Lovebirds will have an amazing time. You will fall in love with a person working in your office and develop good relationship leading to marriage.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



It is time to relax and enjoy. You will enjoy a very favorable phase in your life. Your financial fortunes will rise. You will also get a good job opening or promotion. You will also plan a major expansion in your business. Additional sources of income will be tapped. You will get an opportunity to meet a very influential person. Enemies will be active but unable to harm you. There will be sweetness in marital life. You will share nice equation with your partner. Relations with neighbors and relatives will be cordial and sweet. Read all documents well before signing them. You will remain active in diversified work areas. Bosses and seniors will be satisfied with your work. You will improve relations with bosses. They will be satisfied with your work and praise you a lot.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



You will enjoy a favorable week. You will make plans for your bright future. You will be concerned about the future of your children. Expenditure on children related activities can be seen. There will be some misunderstanding between close relatives but it will be resolved quickly. The relationship will improve and bonding will get strong. You will receive the blessings of elders, relatives and senior persons. New acquaintances and contacts will be made. You will understand the needs, expectations of your partner well. You will maintain your creativity. You will develop contacts with new people and improve your relationship with old acquaintances. Government matters will be solved. You will feel a new energy with in you.

## Amitav Ghosh's Jungle Nama to make stage debut soon

By Sukant Deepak

A few days back, when author Amitav Ghosh was doing an event for his book 'Jungle Nama' in Amest, Italy, some of Ali Sethi's songs were played. Later, everyone wanted to know where they could get them. "We are now actually developing a stage performance of 'Jungle Nama' with the help of the University of Pennsylvania," Ghosh tells LANS.

'Jungle Nama' (HarperCollins) is Amitav Ghosh's verse adaptation of an episode from the legend of Bon Bibi, a tale popular in the villages of the Sundarbans, which also lies at the heart of the novel 'The Hungry Tide' (2004). It is the story of the avaricious rich merchant Dhona, the poor lad Dukhey, and his mother; it is also the story of Dokkhin Rai, a mighty spirit who appears to humans as a tiger, of Bon Bibi, the benign goddess of the forest, and her warrior brother, Shah Jongoli.

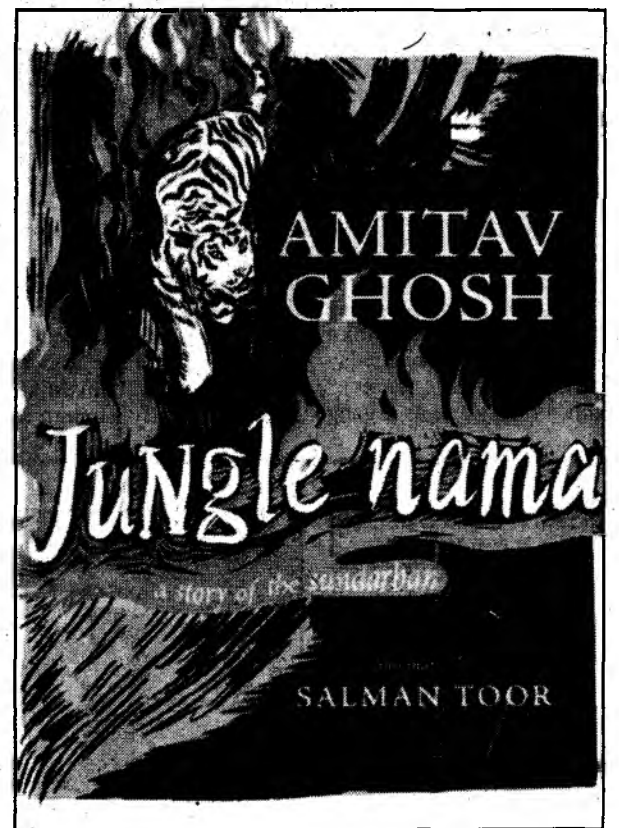
The original print version of this legend, dating back to the 19th century, is composed in a Bengali verse meter known as dwipodi poyar. The book is a free adaptation of the legend, told entirely in a poyar-like meter of 24 syllable couplets that replicate the cadence of the original.

The first-ever book-in-verse by Amitav Ghosh, 'Jungle Nama' evokes the wonder of the Sundarbans through its poetry and is accompanied by artwork by the artist Salman Toor. Now, Audible, a leading creator and provider of premium audio storytelling has come up with an audio edition of the folktale performed by Ali Sethi.

There is something about the Sunderbans that makes Ghosh visit them again and again. "It is a fascinating and rich landscape, teeming with stories of all kinds, What is of greatest interest to me is that these stories are often about non-humans, as well as humans - just as is the case with Jungle Nama," says this recipient of the Padma Shri Honour.

Talk to him about the unique collaboration with Salman Toor and Ali Sethi, and the author who has known Toor since he was a student at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, which is a few blocks from his house, remembers that it was evident even back then that he was immensely gifted, and in the years since he has proved this again and again.

"So his was the first name that came to my mind when I was thinking of an artist to work with. But by that time Salman had become incredibly successful, with a one-man show coming up at the Whitney Museum in New York - something that is almost unprecedented for an artist of his age. But then the pandemic intervened, and the Whitney show was postponed, so it became possible for him to take on this project. And the experience of collaborat-



ing with him was astonishing; he has created some truly marvellous images for the book," says Ghosh, winner of the 54th Jnanpith award, India's highest literary honour.

As for Ali Sethi, the author has known even longer - he took a class with Ghosh back in 2003, when the author was doing a stint at Harvard. Remembering that back then he (Sethi) was more a writer than a musician, Ghosh says, "But in the years since he has grown into a very cerebral, thoughtful person, so he was able to completely enter the spirit of 'Jungle Nama'. The songs he has composed for the audiobook are at once catchy, and musically interesting."

As far as the audiobook goes, it was Ali Sethi, and his team, along with the HarperCollins tech team that dealt with Audible.

"Fortunately I didn't have to get into that part of it. But I do indeed think that we will be hearing books much more in years to come. This has already become a major part of the book market, and I think this will continue," feels Ghosh, whose latest book 'The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis' (Penguin Random House India) released in October.

*"Life is neither good or evil, but only a place for good and evil."*

— Marcus Aurelius

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.109 SHILLONG, MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2021

### Signals from Tripura

CIVIC elections were generally fought on the basis of local issues. They still are, but only to an extent as political parties pitch in with all their resources to prove their might and seek to outwit each other. Politics takes the upper hand over local issues. So too with Tripura, where the ruling BJP aggressively campaigned and swept the polls completely. Of the total 334 seats, the CPIM took three seats while Trinamool Congress and a local entity took one seat each; the rest went the BJP way. The three-year-old Biplab Kumar Deb-led BJP government was thought to be losing mass base and there were talks that it would not be able to return to power in 2023. It was also in this context that the present civic polls in Tripura were watched with considerable national interest. This win can at best boost the morale of the ruling establishment in the state but is no guarantee to an equally good public response to the BJP in the next assembly polls. The scenario could change either way as public mood is not a constant.

The Trinamool Congress has obviously taken a hit at a precise moment when it was trying to widen its base in the North-East, where the political sands are slippery and scope for power-play high. Money power largely dictates the political contours in this region. Yet, the message that the 2018 assembly polls gave in Tripura was that the people — mainly the tribal population — cannot be taken for granted. When the BJP rallied their support, two Bengali-centric political establishments there, namely the CPIM and the Trinamool Congress, were swept aside. The way these two political establishments ended up in the present civic polls is proof that the scenario has not changed. This, granted that the present civic elections were held in a fair manner. The allegations of malpractices that came from the CPIM and the Trinamool might have some grain of truth; or the two parties were taking advance bail from an impending defeat.

The message to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is that the road ahead for her to achieve her ambition(s) is paved with thorns. A normal growth for a party is one thing; "strengthening" a party with turncoats is a different matter. Tripura has sent a clear message to the TMC base in Kolkata. For Biplab Deb, the coming two years are important. It's time for him to zealously build on the gains and work with more energy to improve the lot of the people, mainly the tribal population. They deserve a better deal.

# Mukul Sangma: The Game Changer

By H H Mohrmen

The inevitable has happened. The Mukul camp in the Congress has finally quit the party and joined the All-India Trinamool Congress. Politics in the state took a new turn when Dr Mukul Sangma finally decided to bid the Congress goodbye. That Mukul Sangma is a tall leader and has the support of many who are close to him, is proven from the fact that apart from the four MLAs who are members of his own family, eight more Congress MLAs had joined him in decamping the INC. It looks like the best of the legislators in the Congress party have faith and trust in his leadership and supported him in the move that he made.

### No Democracy in the Grand Old Party (GOP)

The question that everybody has is - why now? Yes, some would ascribe the reason for his abandoning the Congress ship, to the appointment of the new president of the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee without following due democratic process. To the surprise of Congressmen and women the incumbent just landed in Shillong one fine day with an appointment letter to the post. No doubt the main reason for defection or rather the last straw that lit the fire was the undemocratic way of electing the state President of the Congress. The inability of the party to democratically elect its national President is also being read by the voters in so many different ways and this is killing the Congress party slowly. The party has been in turmoil and has been on a downward slide since 2014, and this was evident when it has not been able to engage in a democratic process to elect its own party president. How can the party talk about democracy when it is not even able to practice what it preaches?

But the main reason why Dr Mukul Sangma left the Congress is that nobody wants to work with the Congress any longer. In his interview with Iban Mawrie of the Shillong Times, he cited the example of the Congress being the single largest party in the 2018 election, but it could not form the government because nobody is willing to work with the Congress party anymore. The image

of the Congress in the state has been on a decline for a few years now and in one fell swoop the status of the party changed from the single largest party in the state Assembly to a party with only five MLAs.

### The Congress without Mukul

Dr Mukul Sangma's detractors would try to put up a brave face and call the defectors as bad apples. They hope that the Congress will now bounce back because of Mukul's departure and they blame him for the Congress's downfall in the state. To some extent this is also true, Prestone Tynsong, Sniawbhalang Dhar, Commingone Ymbon, Lakhmen Rymbui defected from the Congress just before the 2018 election and joined the NPP and UDP respectively. But the other truth is also that without Dr Sangma the Congress literally has no presence in the Garo hills. Now the Congress will have to fight it out with all the parties for the votes in the Khasi Jaintia region only.

### A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

For Vincent H Pala his effort to bring back his guru and mentor in politics into the party's fold is a case of what they say in Pnar "beh iei wa her, iei iei wa dem" (chasing the flying bird but ignoring the one that's not moving). Despite the fact that DD Lapang had categorically stated that he is happy with being the adviser to the present CM, yet this did not deter Pala and his women's league to woo the grand old man of Meghalaya politics to rejoin the party. One fails to understand the kind of influence or magic that Lapang has that at his age, the Congress would desperately want him to rejoin the Congress. How can he alone be able to change the fate of the party, but the outcome is now clear. Pala ignores the birds in the hand for the one in the bush. Hopefully Vincent learns his lesson albeit the tragic way.

### Pala and his "Et tu Brutus moment?"

Vincent Pala being an engineer by profession would perhaps not be familiar with the famous last words made by Julius Caesar when he was

assassinated in the famous play by William Shakespeare named after Julius Caesar himself. In the Act 3 Scene 1 of the play, Caesar could not believe his eyes when he saw his friend Marcus Junius Brutus was also part of the conspiracy to kill him. He uttered the tragic words "You too Brutus?!". In this case Pala too could not believe that another Congress stalwart Charles Pynogrope would desert the party. Perhaps Pala needs to work harder to learn the tricks of the trade that in politics there is much more than what meets the eye. The most important lesson from many whom he had betrayed in the past is, people may forgive him, but they do not forget.

### Mukul and his leadership

No doubt Mukul too has his flaws, but it cannot be denied that he had shown exemplary leadership when he was the Chief Minister of the state. When I was asked who amongst the three contenders would you consider to be the best candidate for the office of the CM of the state? The first thing that came to my mind was the MUA M-Tab that the government had distributed to all the class 11 and class 12 students in the state. For at least two consecutive years the MUA government during Mukul's tenure as the Chief Minister ensured that all class 11 and 12 students in the state received the M-Tab. You may ask why and how this is connected to Mukul Sangma being a good leader. In the last two years the pandemic has affected the students' studies but imagine the changes that these 'M-Tabs' with inbuilt syllabus bring for the students of Classes 11 and 12. The Tabs would have been a great help to the students particularly those who study class 11 and class 12 science who were also preparing themselves for NEET and JEET.

The pandemic has hit the poor parents in the state very hard and apart from having to feed the family, they were compelled to buy smart phones for their kids' online classes. These Tabs would hardly cost Rs 5000 and that would be much cheaper than the smartphones that the par-

ents of the students had to buy for their kids. It would have been a great relief to the poor parents if the government had continued to supply these tabs to the students. In a way Mukul saw what was going to happen and was way ahead of his time. More importantly he had the interest of the students close to his heart.

### Conrad basking in Mukul's legacy

The government went gung-ho to celebrate the Cherry Blossom festival which was started by Dr Mukul Sangma. The MUA government also promoted arts and literature by promoting Arts and Literature festivals like CALM festival during its tenure. The other innovative development approaches, the foundation of which was laid by the Mukul Sangma-led MUA government was the Basin Development Agency. The various Basin development agencies have become platforms from which the government implemented the different projects supported by World Bank, JICA, IFAD and other financial institutions and agencies. In fact, Conrad's new programs like FOCUS and PRIME also operated using the various Basin Development Agencies' platforms.

### Mukul's Dynastic Politics

One thing that Mukul cannot fault the Congress for, is the dynastic aspect of the party, because he is also playing the same game. Till today he has three of his family members as MLAs in the state legislative assembly. Mukul and the other Sangma from Garo hills are starting their own political dynasty in the Garo hills region of the state. This has also encouraged the Dhar family to do the same thing in the Khasi Jaintia hills region of the state. Till date three members of their family are in the legislative assembly. Dr Sangma may be a good leader but promoting only his family members in politics is not good for democracy. In spite of the fact that dynastic politics is bad for the state, Mukul Sangma's dynasty will stay for at least another five-year term. Dr Sangma is indeed a game changer and since politics is unpredictable, Mukul Sangma still has a big role to play in state politics.

Email: hhmohrmen67@gmail.com

## Indian people have no distaste for dynastic rule Desi dynasties and the one with sophistication and poise

By Sushil Kutty

When Mamata Banerjee made nephew Abhishek Banerjee TMC's general secretary in June of this year, they said she was following in the footsteps of 'Behan' Mayawati, who had appointed her brother to an important post in the Bahujan Samaj Party. Mayawati, a spinster like Mamata, clarified that her brother was doing it 'pro bono'. Apparently, the brother was not bachelor-for-life like BSP founder Kanshi Ram.

The Congress and Samajwadi Party cannot say that for themselves. How can anybody be a 'dynast' if that "anybody" has stayed bachelor or spinster? 'Behan' Mayawati and Mamata 'Didi' had to settle for brother and nephew. It's got to do with 'legacy'. Even spinsters want to have the satisfaction that their 'dynasties' will not die with them, and there will be somebody to tell bedtime stories of them and their glory to descendants!

For sure, the next one in line will have to be of the Vakra blood. But that is not going to stop the NGV dynasty.

Narendra Modi and the BJP can try to stop, as they are doing now, and like they will keep trying in the years to come. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will use every occasion and platform to drive home the point that dynasty is bad for India and he will not wait for the counter to sink in before he is slinging mud on dynasts in general and the NG dynasty in particular.

He did it in 2014; he spoke of it in 2015. And now, just the other day, he spoke of the bane of the dynasties in his Samvidhan Day speech in the Central Hall of Parliament. In fact, there is this sneaking feeling that the Modi Government started "celebrating" Constitution Day from 2015 on just so that Narendra Modi gets at least one day in the year to vent against the NG dynasty



### Letters to the Editor

#### Sports and Identity

Editor,

There is a very close connection between sports and identity not only in India but elsewhere too. Sports historians have been writing about it. Sports have a great potential to reaffirm and reassert identity in a highly competitive environment. One only has to watch World Cup football matches or an Indo-Pakistan cricket match to see the kind of hysteria which they produce especially in the context of identity. For example, the meta-narrative of Indian takes over all other kinds of identities—caste, class, ethnic, linguistic, religious etc.—at least for a short period of time when an Indo-Pakistan cricket match happens. It appears as though nationalism cannot have a better platform to thrive than an Indo-Pakistan cricket match.

The recent demand from some quarters for giving primacy to the local boys and girls from Meghalaya in the selection of players for the state in different sports and games has drawn our attention once again to the relationship between sports and identity. This demand has raised an interesting and important question whether one's identity should determine selection or is it the talent which needs to be the main consideration. Some sports associations have argued that there cannot be

reservation in sports as talent should be the main consideration in selection of players and local talent, if available, may be given preference (if not reservation). Therefore, what this suggests is that serious and sustained efforts should be made to promote talent among the boys and girls from the state and as and when they become available they may be given preference as it happens in the sports associations of other states too.

In this context I wish to refer to cricket in Meghalaya about which I know a thing or two since my son Pranay represented the state in cricket in both Under-16 and Under-19 categories. I still remember the first day when I took him to the Polo ground to introduce him to the game of cricket. I saw JJ Lamare (a well-known local cricketer) batting at nets which hugely impressed me. He was very compact and meticulous as a batsman. Then I saw Mark Ingti bowling who looked menacing as a bowler with his tall and muscular body. Their fitness levels were top-class comparable to the best among cricketers at the international level. I was actually surprised to see such talent in the state and felt happy that I was not doing anything wrong by introducing my son to the game of cricket in Meghalaya. Some of the talent (both local and non-local) which I noticed was quite appreciable. I always felt that given the right encouragement some of these

players could grow into national heroes.

Then there was Peter Lamare, the senior most coach in Meghalaya who guided young players (including my son for whom he had an admiration for his work ethic, discipline and of course, the cricketing ability) quite competently. He recognised talent as a critical element in sports and did everything possible to encourage it. There were others, too, such as selection committee members (who were mostly from Meghalaya) who never discriminated against non-local players and gave due importance to talent. The fact that the Meghalaya Cricket Association has grown to this level is a testimony to the fact that it encouraged talented players (both local and non-local). There were some sporadic instances of how talented young boys and girls were denied the opportunities to prosper but on the whole the story of Meghalaya cricket is an encouraging story of how players, coaches and staff from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds came together to promote the game of cricket in the state.

I have no doubt that demands such as the one which has been raised recently about primacy being given to local players would encourage different sports associations to deliberate and do everything possible to promote talent among the boys and girls of the state. Once really talented local players emerge from the state such demands

would lose their very relevance as such players could walk into any team on the basis of their pure talent.

Yours etc.,  
DV Kumar,  
Professor, Dept of Sociology, NEHU,  
Shillong

#### Why seasoned leaders left the Congress?

Editor,

Meghalaya produced several seasoned leaders. They always served the state and their respective parties with utmost sincerity and diligence. Among them, the Indian National Congress in Meghalaya has been found to be preferred over others. By and large, its leaders in Meghalaya had won the trust of the majority of the electorate. But of late we hear murmurs of discontentment among the leaders of this national party. The recent defection of 12 Congress MLAs to TMC at one go in the state has sent a fearful tremor across the country. The reasons why so many leaders are unhappy with one of the oldest party is not very difficult to notice.

As claimed by many, this party firmly believes more in the family than democratic principles. This had irked even our veteran leader and former Lok Sabha Speaker - late PA Sangma leading to the formation of NCP. TMC is another offshoot of the same Congress which is

now emerging as a stronger entity. Going by various comments on social media it can be concluded that the "family interest" always reigns supreme here in INC. This party has never found a single suitable leader to hold the party presidency in over a decade except from the Gandhi family. What is most astonishing is that the party continues to admire Rahul Gandhi though he lacks even the basic acumen of a diplomatic leader. His morning speech clashes with that of the evening. Nothing could be more amazing than when people continue to applaud him, and he gets more charged up! He often utters promises which are totally impractical. A joke is still going round about his vehement claim of introducing a machine that would turn potatoes into gold.

Yes, there are countless instances when its key party members were publicly humiliated. Former President Pranab Mukherjee at times expressed his displeasure against the Gandhi family. Himanta Biswa Sarma defected from the party and joined BJP when his self-esteem got hurt. This cost the party dearly in Assam. Please find out who is to blame? Former Punjab Chief Minister - Amarinder Singh retorted with his shikhis bluntness against the party when he was unceremoniously shown the door. Were there any solid reasons to sideline the popular Punjab Chief Minister then? Has it not consequently

damaged party image in the eyes of the public? A senior journalist Patricia Mukhim points out - "The infamous moniker 'grand old party' seems hellbent on committing political suicide from Punjab to Meghalaya", ("Present political churning... - ST, 26 Nov).

With so many successive electoral defeats and failures in the past several years, the party should have chosen to sit for deep soul-searching. Unfortunately, this has never happened. Sonia Ji still wears the queen's crown with pride while Rahul Gandhi roars with immaturity. One wonders when the crown will be put on the head of the non-Gandhi leaders. Were Lyngdoh, Sangma, Gogoi, Tharoor, Scindia, Chidambaram not more efficient and eligible for the party high command's post? The true spirit of democracy in the party always attracts more leaders. No doubt we badly need a good opposition party for a healthy political ecosystem. Come what may, the buzzword 'Khela hobe' should not impinge upon the friendly ethos of mutual respect for each party. All leaders should stand together to uphold the integrity of the nation.

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gwalli,  
Shillong

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Lalu Prasad Yadav is a 'dynast' of the old order. He didn't want to leave anything to chance. So, there were nine offspring to take his dynasty into charted waters. Now, there is the squabbling duo, Tejaswi and Tej Pratap, the favoured and the outcast, so to speak, a la Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb. There was also the time when wife Rabri Devi followed Lalu to CM-ship. That was ages ago. Now Lalu can't call out for anything, but he can't also let go of legacy before he cashes in his chips!

Farther west, Akhilesh Yadav did an Aurangzeb on papa-netaji Mulayam. But there was reconciliation and, today, the father and the son understand each other although the "barather" in the dynasty, Shivpal Yadav, can't stomach the easing of the rumbling and the grumbling between the father-son! The fact of the matter is, these are 'desi dynasts' and haven't picked up the niceties and the graces of the line like the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty has exemplified over the decades since Independence.

The Nehru-Gandhis can take pride that there has never been a rift in the NG dynasty, ever. Succession has been smooth like the Ganges in the Great Plains. Brothers Rajiv Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi didn't have a problem on who would succeed, nor does Rahul and Priyanka have. There was nobody to challenge Indira Gandhi because she was a woman alone. Now, the NG has branched into the 'V' and,

with all the venom he has saved for them in his heart.

That can't be. That will amount to too much scheming in one person. And no one, not even Narendra Modi, can hold so much hate for the NG dynasty a.k.a 'Family'. How about the people of India, does the 'public joi hai sab jaanti hai' hold a grudge against dynasties, NG dynasty in particular?

The answer is a tight slap delivered backhanded! Whether it is the Abdullah dynasty of J&K, the Badal dynasty of Punjab; the Mulayam Yadav dynasty of UP, the Lalu Yadav dynasty of Bihar; the Thackeray dynasty of Maharashtra or the DMK dynasty of TN, people everywhere chose them to lead again and again.

The NG dynasty at the centre of it all has always managed to secure the confidence of the people of India. And it doesn't matter how much is spoken of against the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, the fact of the matter is 'Hindustan ki Janata' do not mind dynasties ruling them so long as there is roti-kapda-makaan and these days, 24/7 wifi and broadband and Netflix. You saw it during the lockdown amidst shortages of oxygen and beds. People died like flies in Delhi and elsewhere and there were bodies floating on the Ganges! But did anybody blame any of the dynasties? No. (IPA Service)

"Poor is the man whose pleasures depend on the permission of another."

— Madonna Ciccone

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.110 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2021

### Meghalaya's poverty indicators

IT is time to take stock of the NITI Aayog surveys that have consistently shown Meghalaya doing poorly in Health, Education and now poverty alleviation. Meghalaya and Assam are ranked equally at 32.67 % of the population remaining below poverty line. NITI Aayog is using the Multi-dimensional Poverty Indicator (MPI) as a metric to define poverty. Other surveys that consider only income as a measure of poverty show that the poverty rate was decreasing at a fair pace in India until Covid 19 after which poverty has risen. Experts claim that this is a temporary phase and that poverty will continue to fall in the coming years.

Being multidimensionally poor does not only categorise people on the basis of income like other indices do on poverty but it gives a broad perspective by covering fields that include nutrition and health, availability of clean drinking water, gas, electricity and others basic things and years of schooling and education level also including wages. NITI Aayog had conducted this survey in collaboration with 12 ministries and in partnership with state governments and Oxford University's, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and UNDP. Bihar tops the list with almost half of its population in poverty at 51.91% followed by Jharkhand(42.2%), Uttar Pradesh(37.8%),Madhya Pradesh(36.7%). Among the North Eastern states Meghalaya and Assam stand at 32.7% among the top 5 multidimensionally poor states. Kerala has the lowest poverty at around only 0.7% and along with Goa, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Punjab has the least poverty rate.

The NITI Aayog did clarify however that the survey is also based on the finding of National Family and Health Survey(NFHS) of 2015-16 and includes preliminary findings by the current NFHS which is ongoing so there might be a slight change in data. But that is still no comfort. Poverty levels at 32.7 % means that welfare schemes of the government are not reaching the lower levels of the society. In that case it is important to know what are the implementation gaps and how those can be plugged. The State Government need not be in denial but look at the problem with pragmatism. It is in fact time for Meghalaya to address the elephant in the room which is the growing landlessness in the rural areas where land is rapidly being alienated in favour of a tribal elite which is using the land for plantation crops for tourism destinations. Meghalaya's political class must show courage to go in for a cadastral survey to find out the exact number of landless people in the state and how this has happened.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Of pride and poverty

Editor,  
Clint Borgen said, "Poverty is relatively cheap to address and incredibly expensive to ignore." Meghalaya is entering into its 50th year of being a full-fledged Indian state; it is very much an occasion to celebrate with pride for the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos. But what has it achieved so far in terms of development and poverty alleviation?

A recent report by NITI Aayog revealed that Meghalaya is among the 5 poorest states in India with 32.67% of the population living under poverty. No doubt the anniversary is an event for celebration to commemorate the hard work of our forefathers but what must be focused on is the status of livelihoods of the state's citizens. Employment generation, modern education, skill upgradation, etc. are areas which need to be looked into with prudence.

With our Hon' PM as the chief guest for the celebration we are hoping that the talks among the officials will be more about the plight of the people and planning for the prosperity of the state in the future rather than just about the anniversary milestone.

Yours etc.,  
Kevin M Shangpliang  
Shillong

#### Meghalaya regressing

Editor,  
The NITI Aayog's all India ranking of states taking into account various parameters has been out in public domain. This time too Meghalaya has been adjudged as the 5th poorest state in India. This is a surprise but it unfortunately reflects back to another report on August 2021 that Meghalaya was ranked at 7th for being the worst performer in 16 indices taken across the North Eastern states. India is remarkable not only for its size - but its diversity. Take a look at these multi-dimensional poverty figures - based on health, education, and standard of living - released by the government think-tank NITI Aayog last week. States like ours being clubbed with Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh almost match up to standards of Sub-Saharan Africa. This should not surprise those who have done a socio-economic comparative study over the past years. However, the state does not even have a human capital development research index, not to speak of other sectors. There is no proper housing development policy to address homeless residents. There is no attempt to address the plight of landless farmers through a pragmatic policy. There is lack of em-

ployment opportunities outside the government sector. Added to that is the skewed land holding pattern that dissuades prospective investors who can create jobs and train others in the chosen industry. Until and unless the politics of mutual appeasement ends we will never be able to see any change even after another 50 years. We need a government that has a set of priorities and takes tough decisions on important issues.

Yours etc.,  
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar  
Shillong

#### Politics of convenience

Editor,  
For the past two weeks we had read letters after letters crying aloud about ethnicity entering the domain of sports in the abode of clouds. Now with climate change, it has lost that title but it still the most peaceful state in the sub-continent with communities of all kinds living in harmony.

That notwithstanding there were sad times as well. The Khasi-Bengali skirmish followed by the Nepali-Khasi conflict are grim reminders of a dark past. Many of our teachers are now settled in West Bengal. The Nepalis had to leave rearing of cattle that supply milk to the Meghalaya Dairy. However, things have slowly

moved on with no ill feelings towards one another. And let us pray that this climate of goodwill continues. But the writing is on the wall of sports being hijacked by the ethnic concept that exhibits its ugly face like in the same manner that Black footballers in Europe or the Indian cricketer of Yorkshire or our bowler Shamim felt the brunt simply because of colour or race or religion. And the saddest part is that politicians play the card of electoral convenience in all parts of the globe, though it is their responsibility to address the above issues.

That it should involve sports which as a matter of fact unites or embraces all peoples is very sad indeed. This racist mindset has percolated into politics too as seen from the reaction of some. In that midnight coup in which 12 MLAs of the Congress joined the TMC. And more painful is the fact that a few (not all) had forgotten the services of these MLAs for their people. These are leaders who had exposed the incompetence of this MDA Government backed by hook or crook by regional parties that are diverse before election and unite before government formation.

Yours etc.,  
Geoffrey S Lyngdoh  
Mawnai  
Shillong 14

### Research beyond tokenism

# Has the Northeast missed the ICAR Bus?

By K.N.Kumar

'The synergy between technology and public policy made the first green revolution possible', said Dr M.S. Swaminathan, in 2015 at a function organized in Delhi to commemorate the golden jubilee of the green revolution. A year later, the Hon'ble Prime Minister made a statement at Guwahati that the North-East could trigger the next Green Revolution in the country. There is no gainsaying that the country will benefit immensely if the North-eastern region (NER) develops. It is also undeniable that the ICAR will have to play a critical role, as the principal technology provider if such a Mission were to be ever conceptualized. But is the ICAR primed enough to take the North-eastern region (NER) to the next level?

I want this article to be seen as a critique and not as criticism. Criticism is judgmental and attempts to find fault, while critique gives a balanced perspective even when the drift is negative. The overall contribution of the ICAR to the nation is undeniably positive. As citizens of the country, we will need to acknowledge and appreciate the phenomenal work done by countless scientists who made us food-secure and gave us the room to focus on other pressing issues ahead of us. That said, it would also be necessary to scrutinize the ICAR's functioning and its impact on the NER if for nothing else, to impel mid-course corrections and trigger structural reforms.

Many enlightened citizens of the region are concerned about the ICAR's impact, or the lack of it on the NER, and some even say that its footprint is minimal, if not negligible. Is that so? Has the North-east missed the ICAR bus? This somewhat subtle implication that the NER has not received the benefits of the ICAR is based on a two-fold argument: (1) that the institutional presence of the ICAR in the region is not adequate to make any transformational impact on the region and (2) that the research prioritization of the ICAR is not in conformity to the region's geography, topography, and socio-economic requirements. I want to analyze these two premises with facts in two articles.

The ICAR's organizational structure and how it has ramified institutionally into the NER will broadly point us toward how effective it can ever be. The ICAR has 113 administrative units in the country. They come in various names and forms - 65 are defined as institu-

tions - only one of which is in the NER (the North-eastern Regional Research Complex, Barapani). None of the 4 Deemed universities of the ICAR is in the NER. ICAR has 13 Directorates/Project Directorates - again, none in the NER. Of the 15 National Research Centres (NRC), four are in the NER. There is only one Central Agricultural University (CAU) at Imphal. The other one promised at Kyrdemkulai has been reneged. How can the ICAR ever significantly impact the NER's agriculture and allied sectors with such limited and near non-existent institutional presence? That would be one fundamental and central question.

And, why do we require deeper presence of the ICAR in the NER? Because, mountain agriculture is qualitatively different from plains-centric agriculture. So, the research has to be specific to the needs of the hills. Of the nearly 40 lakh hectares under cultivation in the NER, 39 lakh hectares - (over 97%) are set aside for food-grain production. 85% of the cropped area is under Rice (that is, in the valleys). So if we seek to trigger any crops-based revolution, where will the additional land come from? Hills, obviously. But NER is one of the 36 biodiversity hotspots of the world. Preserving biodiversity will, therefore, be non-negotiable. So, it is a delicate and sensitive job to promote cultivation without destroying the diversity of flora and fauna. Unquestionably, mountain agriculture needs different technologies, crops, diverse approaches, and far more research sensitivity than currently rendered, even at a pan Indian level. The sub-Himalayan foothills from Arunachal to the Aravallis, Western Ghats, and the Eastern Ghats present different research challenges, and I don't believe the ICAR has enough institutional presence to undertake such hills-specific research. How many institutions have been set up by the ICAR to research mountain agriculture? I could count six (out of the 113) - (1) Central Potato Research Institute (CPRI), Shimla, (2) Central Institute of Temperate Horticulture (CIHT), Srinagar, (3) Indian Institute of Soil & Water Conservation (IISSW), Dehradun (4) Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, CPRI, Kasargod, and (5) Vivekananda Parvatiya Krishi Anusandhan Samstha (VPKAS), Almora and of

course, (6) the NE Regional research complex, Barapani. North-east India is predominantly small farm agriculture. Small landholders (<2ha) constitute 76 per cent of the rural households and 82% of these small-holders rear livestock to supplement their livelihoods. 19% of the rural households in NER are landless and being the most disadvantaged of the population, rely heavily on livestock. Smallholders have more income and employment opportunities in livestock and fisheries production than in land-intensive crop production. Lesser the landholding more is the inclination of the people to move into the livestock and fisheries sectors.

And the Livestock sector is growing at a much faster clip than the crops sector. The crops sector grows at about 3.4%, while the livestock sector grows at 8.24%, and the contribution of livestock in the GVA (Gross Value Added) of the agriculture and allied sectors has now touched 28.63%. Yet, the livestock sector does not have either the policy or the financial or research support it deserves. The sector receives only about 12 per cent of the total public expenditure on agriculture and allied sectors, which is disproportionately small considering its contribution to agricultural GDP. Likewise, fish production in India has reached an all-time high of 14.16 million metric tonnes during 2019-20, contributing to 1.24 % of the total GDP and 7.28 per cent of the agricultural GDP. The fisheries sector is growing at an annual growth rate of 11%. NER is a water-rich region and accounts for 236 edible freshwater fish species.

Yet, despite the paramount importance of Livestock and Fisheries to the NER, hardly any impactful research is going on in the NER in either of these sectors. The DDG (Animal Sciences) and the DDG (Fisheries) of the ICAR report to the D.G. from the crop sciences division. How can a D.G. with a background in crop sciences be aware of the research priorities of the Animal Sciences and Fisheries? It is not about individual competence; it is about the structural flaw in the organization about which I am writing. If the carving out of a separate Department for Fisheries at the national level acknowledges the need to give exclusive attention to the Fisheries sector, why isn't

the same principle applied to fisheries research? Or, for that matter, to Animal sciences research?

Most original work of the ICAR generally focusses on crops and issues applicable to the national context and not specific to the NER. That is not to say that the ICAR in the region has done no work, but nothing so substantial happened as to believe that ICAR is now ready for take-off or trigger the next revolution. I am willing to stretch the argument deeper and provide a ground for unbundling the ICAR itself to let certain divisions like the Animal Sciences and Fisheries to unshackle themselves from the clutches of the crop sciences. Why aren't there Indian Councils for Livestock Research and Fisheries Research in our country? Why are there turf wars between the ICAR and the Veterinary Council of India? Why should these two Government of India organizations go to courts to resolve even relatively minor issues? There are not many satisfactory answers to such questions.

Given the importance of the livestock, including Fisheries, to the NER, was it rocket science that the ICAR in the last 75 years did not realize the need to develop human resources in the region by establishing a central Livestock University to cater to the NER? The Government of Meghalaya recently decided to establish a Meghalaya State Veterinary, Dairy and Fishery Sciences University at Kyrdemkulai. It will become operational in two years. Because the ICAR/DARE never rose to the occasion, the state government now must stretch its limited resources to establish one such university that the NER could have immensely benefited had the ICAR decided to do it by itself.

The limited point is that the overall impact of the ICAR institutions in the region is perceptibly minimal, and its research prioritization at the best of times, is indifferent. The notional physical presence and the unimpactful research outcomes point us toward some perfunctorness in the NER. The inclination to expand the footprint too appears to be nominal. Tokenism won't make any difference either to the emotions or to the livelihoods of the people. In my next article, I will place a few thoughts about the research prioritization of the ICAR. Or, the skew of it, or worse, the lack of it! (The writer is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' Empowerment Council)

#### Need to scale up vaccine production

Editor,  
In the light of the emerging new variant of coronavirus Omicron found in South Africa that has been designated as a "Variant of Concern" by the WHO, Prime Minister Narendra Modi directed a review of plans to ease international travel restrictions. Many countries have suspended flights with African countries. Meanwhile the new virus variant has spread to more countries. The variant has shaken the smugness of the developed world. In the wake of the emerging new virus variant, Indian scientists have raised alarm.

African countries need support to control it so that it does not spread in the world. The new variant is concerning as it has as many as 32 mutations. It can escape immunity and it has increased transmissibility. Thus the variant has serious public health implications. Its emergence is a serious setback in the battle against the disease and it is a dent in the economic recovery. Given the gravity of the situation, international travellers from risk countries must be subjected to rigorous screening and testing. Their contacts must be closely tracked.

There is a wide chasm

between the vaccinated and unvaccinated people across the world. This gap causes rise of variants. The developed world must put in efforts to bridge this gap. The developed world must help the poorer world by supplying sufficient number of vaccines. Vaccine production and availability must be scaled up.

As for India, it cannot afford yet another episode of health and economic crisis. It must get rid of its complacency about the disease. Over 100 crore vaccinations are a great achievement. On the other hand, much remains to be done in the fight against the pandemic. Given that the potency of the vaccines weakens over time, India needs to introduce booster shots. Further, there must be proper centre-state consultations on the status of the pandemic control. More importantly, the public must recognise the gravity of the situation and follow covid appropriate behaviour. Indifference to covid protocol means endangering one's own life and the lives of others. If we are not cautious and alert, we will have to pay a heavy price for our folly.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Kollam

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## Higher education in the state: Need for more inclusiveness

By Dr Saji Verghese

It is a matter of pride for the teachers' association and the teachers individually that their contribution to the state and our region is noticeable for about four decades. While Meghalaya is celebrating its 50th year of its existence next year, the teaching community of the state at all levels, - school, college and also of the University would be remembered and a rich tribute must be made of the immense contributions to the social, economic and political transformations in the region. While we celebrate the achievements there are a number of areas which need a collaborative and consecrated effort from all the stakeholders.

In contemporary times, the world at large points to a need for teachers to actively involve themselves in community development exercises. Contributions both from academics as well as students show a shared sense of frustration with the current situation in higher education. Unfortunately, it has become a commodity in the global economy where measurability and comparability are paramount. Higher education has now become a privileged commodity of the wealthy and the elite. How about the established institutions, both colleges and private universities of our state which have had high NAAC gradings and self-financing courses - the fees for which are exorbitant? What about the placement of candidates who have come out with flying colours?

The prospectus of many of our higher educational institutions display attractive courses with extortionate fee structure and they rather contribute to the economy of the institutions only. Are the teachers who teach such courses offered salaries comparable to the fees charged? It is highly disproportionate. Is this ethical on the part of the management? The current political climate ('boot suit ka' and their collaborators in different states) encourages education to be represented and treated as private consumer goods and as the public site for the production of skills thought exchangeable to advantage in the global economy. The so-called quality mechanisms, procedures and audit and accreditation don't seem to enhance the quality of education but aim at introducing uniformity which in turn commercialises the sector, further making it a privilege of the rich, not of the 'needy and the capable'. This issue could be tackled if there are universities and more higher educational institutions owned and managed by the public sector, especially the state government.

Higher education offers the potential to support global, national, and local community development. Higher education must open and throw the responsibility upon ourselves to the global issues that concern and threaten the life of every and any living organism on earth. We, the teachers need to provide empirical and conceptual insights into the ways in which the educational institutions and the state, in general can help to achieve and exceed the outcomes enshrined in the sustainable development goals. A concerted effort on the part of universities along with the government and the private sector would lead to realising such development potentials. The limited academic freedom and institutional autonomy impede this fundamental objective of education. The institutions of higher education need to become concerned with the global and the human, in promoting freedom to cultivate intellectual curiosity through education and research, and stimulating a more holistic imagery of sustainable development.

Institutions can undertake basic and applied research to develop such user friendly mechanisms for practical applications of scientific knowledge for maximisation of utility of the available resources. This would lead to furtherance and maximisation of the use of bio energy resources which reduce carbon emission (as emphasised in COP 26). The "think globally, act locally" slogan has been an integral part of

climate action. It embodies the idea that instead of waiting for grand breakthroughs to "fix the world," we should implement environmentally conscious solutions into everyday decisions and actions. Though on their own it may be of negligible impact, in aggregate, these can have a globally transformative effect. In this line of thought, while we had enough scientific, environmental reasons to discourage the farmers from taking up palm oil seed cultivation which was in the social media in the recent past we have not been able to suggest what ideally is to be taken up, instead on a large scale basis.

Another issue of global importance that needs to come into the radar of educators is on the serious ethical questions of how to ensure justice in the contemporary world. The world is currently experiencing utter absolutism of the kind which leaves many groups oppressed or marginalised. This is the result of what is called Political Absolutism. It means for the ruled, complete lack of individual freedom. Political Absolutism is synonymous with despotism, dictatorship, autocracy. It is realized in the totalitarian states as established by fascism, national socialism, and bolshevism. Such an absolutist attitude seems to be prevalent in every walk of life, namely the family, the organisation, the profession in relation with the party, state, society etc.

Edward Said in his book, 'Culture and Imperialism' points out that during the colonial period, intellectuals who should have been the guardians of the conscience of their own nation and culture were no more than echoes of their community's prejudices, their noble ideals notwithstanding. This political conservatism leaves no scope for the minority communities to attain any desirable positions. Higher education needs to aim at developing goals to make such a congenial atmosphere for each and everyone to achieve a higher level of plateau and also for every community within a nation state to reach the highest level of realisation and achievement. The State must allow the citizens to pursue the freedom that they value and be allowed to develop their agency of freedom, irrespective of social class, ethnicity, and gender, leading ultimately to holistic human development. If teachers and pupils learn to conquer situations of domination, oppression and negative forms of dependence they become exemplary models for others to emulate.

An area where a considerable amount of research and activity should be encouraged is on conflict resolution. Considering that our region has for a long period been conflict ridden, research needs to be promoted on finding ways to build peace. A peaceful, loving, accepting, mutually tolerant society that must be focused upon as the viable goal of a research. Social science contends that human nature is not intrinsically violent or warlike. If we have to be taught to be wary of strangers, to be anti-semitic it is rather being non-natural. We seem to have forgotten the natural way of life where cooperation and peaceful co-existence is the order of the day. Higher education must lead one to be socialized to trust, to appreciate others/communities of their capabilities and achievements, cooperate, and to respect the law. We can learn to negotiate, mediate, to compromise, to share, and to bargain in conflict situations.

"In principle, there is no limit to forgiveness, no measure, no moderation, no 'to what point?'" said Derida pointing to forgiveness as a way to reach a situation of peace, as in Christian theology 'seventy times seven' to forgive. Education which does not emphasize the importance of international understanding and peace is mere training and instruction. One must be allowed to choose whether to socialize into the existing order, or make ways to alter the social order.

(The writer teaches in Lady Keane College, Shillong)